

**Warped Mirrors:
Contemporary Representation of Women on
Screen**

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ABSTRACT

Feminist art practices have been challenging the misrepresentation of women in mainstream media and technology since the 1960s. Performing to camera and creating video installations gave artists power to subvert visual mediums and challenge conventional modes of viewing bodies on screens. With the introduction of Web 2.0 and self-representation practices such as selfies and vlogging becoming everyday activities, women have had more control over how their image is presented in public. However social media spaces are not neutral spaces and at times regulate and privilege visibility of certain 'types' of female subjects that are aligned with stereotypical images of feminine beauty.

This thesis examines the performance of postfeminist subjectivities on social media and considers these performances to be perpetuating notions of control, agency and authenticity that are tied to gendered, racialised and classed norms of femininity. This investigation looks at how social networks regulate these gender performances and within these contexts notions of agency and authenticity may be implied but can never fully be achieved. This thesis critically examines feminist art practices, by way of case studies and my own practice, that infiltrate these platforms and perform these gendered norms as acts of subversion. I specifically focus on how the artworks are experienced and read through the varied contexts and temporalities they are presented in, seeking to find instances of subversion and control. These practices are explored in relation to theories of subjectivity, performance and installation art, and interactivity.

This emerging form of feminist art practice on social media is a relatively new field. I propose that my theoretical and practice-based research contributes to understanding the complexities involved in attempting to uncover how social networks perpetuate postfeminist notions of agency and authenticity due to the nature of self-produced content and the temporal and contextual conditions of spectatorship. Through this thesis I propose that my practice develops an alternative strategy to performing subjectivity on social media where it explicates the construction of a fragmented and contradictory subject through strategies of liveness, duration and interactivity

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Laura O'Connor, April 2018

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the performance of postfeminist subjectivities on social media and considers these performances to be perpetuating notions of control, agency and authenticity that are tied to gendered, racialised and classed norms of femininity. This investigation looks at how social networks regulate these gender performances and within these contexts ideas of agency and authenticity may be implied but can never fully be achieved. The aim of this thesis is to critically examine feminist art practices¹, by way of case studies and my own practice that infiltrate these platforms and perform these gendered norms as acts of subversion and agency. I specifically focus on how the works are experienced and read through the varied spatio-temporal contexts they are presented in, seeking to find instances of subversion and control. It is my argument that in order for these works that are presented and created on social media to be experienced as forms of subversion they must position the spectator as complicit in the viewing. This thesis explores how the ability to control performances on social media by artists is limited based on how they are viewed, experienced and appropriated on personal devices and the networks. As well as studying the work of artists in the field I created works that exist on social media through performing live for streaming networks, posting privately created videos to social networks and performing publicly whilst simultaneously streaming on to social media. It is through processes of experimentation in this field that I concluded that works that focus on disrupting how the bodies of young women are regulated on social media, either by the network or in spectator responses, must consider the positioning of the spectator and as such have control over the conditions of viewing.

¹ As Hilary Robinson notes there is no such single thing as a 'feminist art' rather describing your artworks as feminist means to describe how the works "are informed by your feminist politics" (Robinson, 1987, p.2). In the case of this study the politics relate to the representation of white femininity on social media and has been regarded as a new wave of feminism or 'fourth wave'. As I engage with feminist politics throughout the thesis it is clear that broad definitions such as 'second wave' and 'cyberfeminism' are contested in their politics and claims.

When I started this research I posed the question of how are female artists attempting to subvert contemporary stereotypes of femininity seen in the self-produced images of young women on social media? And, what implications does using the Internet and subverting seemingly freely chosen female subjectivity² pose? I framed these questions to act as a critical enquiry and also a practical enquiry employing case studies and studio practice as my main methodology. Narrowing down these broad questions I focused on what types of femininity and who were the young women was I talking about. The female subject represented in my work is close to my own personal identity. In the past my work explored the representation of 'women' in cinema, advertising and art history. I used the term 'women' to speak for 'all women'. This naive and unconsciously narrow-minded notion of 'woman' as a specific category was an issue I had to address. In looking at responses to representation one must look at who is being represented.³

Although I may feel like the norm of feminine beauty in western media doesn't represent me, she is a lot closer to representing me than non-white, lesbian or trans-women. Kathy Delivsky states that femininity "is raced as white" and "white women represent the 'Benchmark Woman' (Thornton 1995), an ideology that constructs 'hegemonic, marginalised and subordinated femininities' (Collins 2004, 193) relative to a white female norm" (2008, p.58). In her essay *Mirror, Mirror* for the catalogue to the exhibition *Whiteness, A Wayward Construction* Amelia Jones describes how in Euro-American culture "it goes without saying" that the white woman is the most beautiful through "deeply ingrained ideological belief that has come to be naturalized as true, at least within

² Subjectivity is used here to describe identities or selfhood that are affected by and produced through numerous social and cultural associations. Nick Mansfield states that: "the subject is always linked to something outside of it—an idea or principle or the society of other subjects" (Mansfield, 2000, p.3). For example, postfeminist subjectivity being a product of consumerist values where notions of choice, individualism and empowerment are aligned with practices of consumption.

³ In his example of the Circuit of Culture, Stuart Hall looks at how meaning is produced through both discourse and semiotics. Within these frameworks meaning is created through the production of signs and language within culture. These codes of language and signs communicate meaning, but also depend on "the practice of interpretation". "Interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code- and by the person at the other end interpreting or decoding meaning (Hall, 1997, p.62). In this sense codes are temporal, as they are only fixed to meaning in specific context. Therefore the notion of representation in this thesis is specific to the codes and contexts described in each chapter.

the dominant cultural imaginary” (Jones, 2003, p.87). Jones explains how by “enacting or exposing whiteness as *obscene*, we can denaturalize it, remove its familiarity and make it into something strange” (ibid.).

The female subjectivity in focus in this thesis is white hetero-normative femininity and how I and other female artists who are young, white and middle-class deal with challenging systems we feel don’t represent our subjectivity but a system that ultimately over-represents white femininity as the ‘Benchmark Woman’. That these systems of representation go unnoticed or ‘without saying’ and are given as ‘norms’ it is in the work of the artists of this research to enact and expose the racialised, classed and gendered norms perpetuated through dominant systems of feminine beauty on social media⁴.

Challenging Systems of “Common Knowledge”

Susanna Paasonen (2014) discusses how new materialist theory challenges cultural theory of representation, for to challenge a form of representation one is acknowledging that representation as a social category. Paasonen uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analysis that cultural theory relies on paranoid reading where critical enquiry onto subjects (in Paasonen’s case porn studies) is based on assumptions. The problem with these assumptions is that there is no room for multiple readings, there is a focus on the negative affects rather than possible positive affects. Similarly, discussing the study of whiteness and the categorisation of whiteness Sara Ahmed (2007) states: “any project that aims to dismantle or challenge the categories that are made invisible through privilege is bound to participate in the object of its critique” (p.150). Sociology researchers have done extensive research in the behaviour of teens on social media and the affects of these interactions and state that researchers must move beyond the moral panics associated with young women performing and expressing their identity online

⁴ The Oxford Dictionary definition of social media is: “Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”. This thesis looks specifically at Instagram, YouTube, Twitter/Periscope, and at a number of porn sites that fall under social media definitions.

(Boyd, 2014; Renold & Ringrose, 2012; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007; Gill, 2011; Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001).

Paasonen (2005, p.7) uses the term 'common knowledge' to describe how the category of woman is addressed online describing it as the "tools of knowing and categorising 'us' and 'them', and policing differences in everyday encounters." Paasonen looks at these objects as "operations of power", much in the way Judith Butler discusses "prevailing epistemes of culture" (Butler, 2000 in Paasonen, 2005) as methods of controlling gender binaries and how spaces on the Internet can work to enforce these common knowledge epistemes. The objects of common knowledge Paasonen (2005) discusses relate to stereotypical ideas of female gender, such as women represented online via websites as (associated with the colour) pink, soft, heterosexual and biologically female (where assumptions around reproductive capabilities are a given). The intention in the practice element of this research was to create a type of postfeminist common knowledge subject. In this construction I would use live performance and performing on social media platforms as methods of critical engagement that challenged dominant narratives of female subjectivity and worked to expose these narratives and reflect onto the spectator as an act of subversion.

Subjectivities

Rosi Braidotti describes the body as "an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc) are inscribed" (2003, p.25). My body is coded whether I agree with how it is coded or not, cultural and social structures subjugate me. Subjectivity here is associated with what Judith Butler (1990) terms "performativity". In her theories on gender and the construction of gender Butler uses the term performativity to describe how gender and identity are effects of power structures and that by thinking of gender as an act makes it "open to splittings" (1990, p.187). Butler describes "subversive repetition" as a method of performing gender with a difference where these "splittings" rupture culturally

inscribed gender norms (ibid, p185). Butler uses drag as an example of how gender can be performed differently in a way that subverts normative expectations where those gendered male are associated with traditional tropes of heterosexual masculinity and those gendered female with tropes of heterosexual femininity. Butler also states that she is not interested in “delivering judgments on what distinguishes the subversive from the unsubversive” (Butler, 1999, preface xxi) that these judgments are context specific. And even then contexts are temporal, therefore proclaiming a performance subversive “runs the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition” especially in commodity culture where subversion carries market value (ibid). This is the risk of the practices in this research- by re-producing norms even through parody or ironic acts they run the risk of becoming commodified.

The subject in focus in this thesis is the postfeminist gender performance of ‘new femininities’⁵ on social media and asks how artists challenging these performances and the structures that regulate norms within such subjectivity can compete with such an over-saturated platform. Gill & Scharff (2011) discuss ‘new femininities’ within a neoliberal framework, they describe the turn to focus on the individual and practices of self-monitoring as a product of late capitalism and neoliberalism and the main subject of this turn to individualism is ‘women’. In their 2011 book *New Femininities* they collate studies on pregnancy, sexuality, sexualisation of girls online, migrant women, Thai prostitutes, motherhood, Muslim women and lesbians and frame the construction of these subjects through notions of postfeminist sensibilities⁶ and neoliberal constructions of the subject. In my research I use this framing of ‘new femininities’ to describe practices of body

⁵ Gill & Scharff (2011, p.2) frame ‘New femininities’ wrapped up scare quotes and “to be followed by an interrogative”. “For us, speaking of ‘femininities’ is a way of highlighting the social production and construction of gender and avoiding essentialism”. Their interrogation of the term femininity follows what they see as a lack of investigation into hegemonic forms of femininity where cultural and media studies tended towards studying women and girls yet there “is a wealth of writing on hegemonic masculinities”.

⁶ Gill describes postfeminist sensibility as the notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways that (some) women are represented; an emphasis upon self surveillance, monitoring and discipline; the dominance of a ‘makeover paradigm’; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked ‘resexualisation’ of women’s bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007, p.149).

maintenance and physical appearance on social media that subscribe to postfeminist neoliberal subjectivity. In conversation with these online practices of 'new femininities' is a new (fourth) wave of feminist art practice. These practices use social networks as tools in their work to challenge the structures of these networks that influence and regulate performances of norms of female subjectivity. Judith Butler's use of Foucauldian theories of how juridical systems of power produce the subjects they come to represent through "the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even 'protection' of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice"(1999 [1990], 4), is useful to this research. These systems of control by those in power work to regulate and define subjectivity, including gender, 'race', class and religion. Butler extends this by focusing on how gender is performed under these regulations, how sex does not define gender but the opposite, one's gender is pre-determined based on cultural and societal systems keeping people in check. To perform gender is to say that gender is a construction and that we are performing or acting within this structure. One's subjectivity falls in to this same system, we are defined by how we act, appear, who we have relations with and the matter we surround ourselves with. In the case of social media one's subjectivity is affected by page likes, uploaded images, adverts targeted due to searches and algorithms, targeted news stories and advertising based on data submitted in online sign up forms. One of the main concerns for me is how an art practice that directly engages with this online 'stuff' can work subversively, as Butler explains, in a way that challenges these constructions in temporal contexts (1999 [1990], xv).

Braidotti's "nomadic subject" is a figuration that draws on a convergence between Luce Irigaray's theories on sexual difference and Gilles Deleuze's theories on becoming. There are differences between Deleuze and Irigaray's theories in that Irigaray looks at sexual difference through the reclamation of feminine subjectivity and desire through strategic mimesis⁷ and Deleuze's intent is to re-

⁷ In *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1997,p.76) Luce Irigaray states: "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible,' of 'matter'-to 'ideas,' in particular to ideas

imagine the philosophical subject altogether (Braidotti, 2002, p.7). Braidotti connects the two theoretical strategies as a way to consider new figurations for the subject, stating that using this figuration is also a way of situating herself “vis-à-vis the institution of philosophy as a discipline: it is a way of inhabiting it, but as an ‘outsider within’, that is to say critically but also with deep engagement” (2002, p.7). Braidotti calls this figuration the “virtual feminine” (2002, p.24). For Braidotti, Irigaray’s sexual difference theory is not essentialist, however she does admit Irigaray’s theories to be based on heterosexuality. By using sexual difference the female body is placed into the discussion of subjectivity where desire and sexual agency are reinstated rather than used against women as forms of oppression.

There are clear distinctions here between the theories of sexual difference and the virtual feminine proposed by Braidotti, and Butler’s notion of gender as performative that excludes notions of the feminine. However, I believe that both theories are relevant to this research and Braidotti would agree to a point that Irigaray’s theories of mimesis are not unlike Butler’s theories of performative subjectivity⁸. My reason for positioning these two theories together is that my research is concerned with how one takes up a feminine position, as in Braidotti’s virtual feminine, in a way that challenges the nature of gender performativity, as in Butler. For Braidotti the subject of feminism is not Woman as Other rather she has taken her distance from the institution of femininity as a subject in process, a post-Woman (ibid, pp.11-12).

Donna Haraway’s writing on the cyborg used as an “ironic political myth” as a rhetorical strategy and political method works to challenge dualistic notions of gender and considers a world without gender as a method of feminist politics. Haraway’s 1985 polemic *A Cyborg Manifesto* addresses issues with Socialist Marxist feminism in the categorisation of ‘woman’ as a homogenous category. Her

about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. ”

⁸ Braidotti states that where the theories depart is in Butler’s failure to account for unconscious processes (Braidotti, 2002, p.51).

use of the cyborg is to imagine a subjectivity that is not coded by gender, racial or classed binaries but a fragmented subject that has no origin. Haraway uses the term "the informatics of domination" to describe the "scary new networks" that have replaced "old hierarchal dominations" (1991, p.161). These networks continue to subjugate individuals into social orders however the language used and forms of subjugation are created through flows of information. Haraway states that: "The biggest threat to such power is interruption of communication" (1991, p.164). Haraway also states that the cyborg is "not subject to Foucault's biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations"(1991, p. 163). These simulations replace representation under the informatics of domination. Following Butler's line of thought that subversive repetition is required to challenge dominant structures of power, Haraway's concept of the cyborg encourages interruptions in the flows of information as political action.

Cyborg gender is a local possibility taking a global vengeance. Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their constructions and deconstructions" (Haraway, 1991, p.180).

The formation of postfeminist subjectivity through the repetition of norms in digital everyday gender performance is challenged here theoretically through concepts of interruptions of information flows and subversive repetition.

Postfeminism on Social Media

I started this research in my mid 20s and as such would categorise myself among other young women artists and also as a young woman who uses social media. The subjectivities explored in this research, through theory and practice, are associated with youth and teenage girls. This has come from aligning my reading of artists performing online through theories of gender performativity and female identity

with research conducted on young women and teens navigating the everyday performance of female subjectivity on social media. Whilst I am not a teenage girl, the theories used by sociological researchers in analysing social media performances by young women and teenage girls are transferrable to the art practices in this research. In comparing the moral panic over the performance of gender on social media to the 1895 moral panic over young women who dared to ride bicycles, Bailey et al. (2013, p.108) state that young women's "online presentations of self involve complex negotiations between the social status rewards of online self-exposure and the gendered risk of harsh judgment that seems to go along with having been 'too' public." The responses to young women performing on social media suggests that these subjects are highly scrutinized based on how they present themselves and these modes of judgment are based on mainstream gender stereotypes. The young woman as a subject of postfeminism is the central figure of this thesis. I investigate the different definitions of postfeminism and how social media rewards youthful beauty, which in turn causes women to present themselves as younger and always in search for youth. In the quest for youth, the presentation of women's bodies online are caught up in endless practices of maintenance and are affected though this relationship between image and body. However as a subject of postfeminism these practices are thought of as empowering especially as young women themselves perform them. These relationships between body and image are looked at through theories of affect, gender performance, sexuality, becoming and relationships with new media devices⁹.

I look at what type of female representation is central to my work and what type of practice is questioning this representation online, specifically why social media? My art practice has always centred around the representation of a female subject that is close to my own yet completely out of reach and also something I feel the need to challenge. Categorised as a white middle class woman,

⁹ For instance Rebecca Coleman (2008) argues that looking at women's relationships with images of bodies through "media effects" is dismissive of women's actual relationships with images and their bodies, and that it is more useful to consider this a more symbiotic relationship where bodies "become" rather than are effected by.

representations of what I should look like are ubiquitous in visual media and I am bombarded by images of white western women. I have always challenged the norms implied by the codes presented in these images by making my own subversive responses through performance to camera works displayed in the gallery. With social media came a platform for individuals to create images of themselves as opposed to being misrepresented in highly produced images in advertising and cinema. Specifically looking at the performance of heteronormative white femininity I noticed that certain tropes of feminine beauty were being reproduced on social networks such as You Tube, Facebook and Instagram. This investigation was aimed at the practices of presenting stereotypes of feminine beauty and lifestyles online that were so aligned with commercial notions of femininity and to see what happened when feminist art interventions played on these performances as acts of subversion. On theorizing studies of self-produced social media content Rosalind Gill states:

The rapid expansion of DIY media via the blogosphere, social networking and other features of Web 2.0 necessarily complicates much of the existing literature in feminist media studies because of the proliferation of representations that are self-produced and could be considered —freely chosen. Binary splits between subject and object no longer hold when distinctions between producers and consumers have become so blurred (Gill, R. 2011, p.66)

This research connects art made on social media sites with feminist performance art, where artworks on social media are specifically made to be viewed on screen, many of the works discussed in this thesis combine performing online with performing ‘in real life’ (IRL). These intermedial¹⁰ performances aim to

¹⁰ Intermedial derives from Fluxus and describes works that are multi-disciplinary. In this case it is used to describe works that are both on social media and performed in public.

expand the visibility and experience of female bodies typically seen on social media by creating immersive environments where the spectator is implicated in these screen relationships. The central theme relating these works is the body and the representation of white heteronormative femininity on social media and how artists connect with audiences on social media differentiating them from everyday self-produced images by young women online. I look at specific strategies of masquerade and parody used by artists to address these concerns within the practice of performing a postfeminist masquerade through teen girl subjects or sexually liberated and in-control femininity. These works take different forms, from live performance, to site-specific online but all are focused on performing a specific type of female subjectivity on social media and incorporating it into practice. My investigation into these practices explores their intention and their execution. Each work is created in a way to subvert or resist dominant narratives of femininity online, this research looks at these works in terms of who they are representing, how they are performing that and whether the works lead to subversion or reproduce the very norms they are challenging.

Fourth Wave Feminist Practices

These art practices are also described by the artists as feminist, and have been categorised as fourth wave feminist.¹¹ Retallack et al. (2016) describe fourth wave feminist politics as characterised by its “emergence in online dialogue” where feminist are “turning to social media sites to make visible marginalised voices and bodies, and the vast expanse of the internet has opened up significant spaces for discourse and resistance of hegemonic notions of femininity”(p.3). Many of the artists in this research position their practices with '70s feminist performance artists such as Hannah Wilke, Carolee Schneeman, Martha Rosler, and also more contemporary artists such as Cindy Sherman, Alex Bag and Vanessa Beecroft. By positioning the works within these feminist art histories the artists make claims that their works are political in their intentions. It is these intentions that are explored in

¹¹ In Robert Adanto's 2015 documentary *The F Word* he describes the artists as fourth wave, many of my case studies feature in this documentary.

the works. By building up a picture of feminist politics and new media and the Internet by first looking at cyberfeminism in Chapter One I introduced early theories and practices that claim to be infiltrating networks of communication as acts of rupture or subversion. I use the debates around cyberfeminism to frame how contemporary or 'fourth wave' works that use similar strategies run the risk of lacking criticality due to a lack of agency or ironic distance.

I employ feminist sociological research, cultural and media theory that focus on the construction of postfeminist subjects in media culture and arguments around agency and authenticity online. Using this subject as my starting point I frame it within theories of cyber, post-human and material feminism that offer strategies of looking beyond gendered binaries in digital subjectivities. I apply these theories throughout this thesis looking at the practical strategies employed in contemporary feminist art practices that challenge stereotypical notions of postfeminist subjectivities. The main question within this research is how is it possible to challenge such assumptions of this female subject online without subjugating oneself to the same system? In answer to this question I have come to the knowledge that due to the context specific nature of these social media spaces the artist must expand the work into a site-specific space in order to have an affect and control¹² the spectator experience.

These works centre around bodily experience, the body of the woman on screen but also experienced through the body of the spectator and in order to effectively control this experience the works must consider the conditions of viewing. To challenge a system that encourages users to be their selves where the act of constructing profiles and curating pictures is in essence performing the self, questions of authenticity are inadequate. In several of the case studies of digital everyday performances by women in this thesis their perceived authenticity is almost more subversive than those intentionally performing through masquerade. In this boundary-less environment where everyone is performing, the

¹² I am aware that I cannot control *how* the spectator experiences the work but I can control the conditions of viewing.

affectiveness¹³ of women artists performing in masquerade is difficult to measure. The challenge I have set in this research is to look at the works in terms of intention, execution, reception and experience. These enquiries take a theoretical and a practical approach and consider how, through art practice, theories of performing gender as a subversive practice can effectively work to challenge norms performed by young women on social media and as regulated by social networks.

Contemporary Screens and New Forms of Spectator

This research considers what constitutes a subversive act and how the strategies in art practices attempt to challenge and rupture norms performed on social media, a platform where contexts are ever changing and notions of spectatorship move beyond feminist film theories of the male gaze¹⁴. Whilst recognising feminist film scholarship on notions of the male and female gaze in cinema 'the gaze' is explored in this thesis through the numerous positions taken by the spectator that move away from conditions of viewing such as the dark theatre space. Here, consideration of the different types of gaze in the performances of female subjectivity on social media in the everyday and in art practice is necessary. Notions of control are impossible to analyse in the viewing of bodies on screen due to the nature of mobile technology and the context collapse¹⁵ of social media audiences. For instance Koffman et al. (2015) term the "selfie gaze" young women are encouraged to promote images of the self as acts of empowerment and also as

¹³ I use the term affective relating to how these works might create embodied experiences in the spectator. In *The Affective Turn?* (2001) Anu Koivunen states what it means to explore affective encounters. "On the one hand, it is to examine media forms, representations and narratives, cultural framings and meaning-making processes. It is to ask how encounters with different media engage senses and affects (emotions, feelings, passions) and, hence, have effects. On the other hand, exploring affective encounters involves inquiring into the gendering, sexualising, classing and racialising of subjects. Affects, in this sense, pose questions about the links between the subjective and the cultural, individual and social, self and other, inside and outside. Hence, studying affective encounters embroils asking how identities are 'lived, felt and practiced' (Ahmed et al 2000, p.15) and 'how we construct our own histories through memory...how we position ourselves within wider, more public, histories' (Kuhn 1992, p.243)" (2001, p.8).

¹⁴ This refers to Laura Mulvey's 1975 polemic *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*, a psychoanalytical reading of the structures within Hollywood cinema. Mulvey was critical of the way the woman in these films was positioned on screen as passive object of the male gaze. These theories are useful to investigations into how subjects are framed and positions of spectatorship, however they are limiting to the investigation of the representation of and by women on social media platforms.

¹⁵ Marwick & boyd (2010, p.115) use the term 'context collapse' to describe how social media technologies "collapse multiple contexts and bring together commonly distinct audiences."

acts of charity¹⁶. This postfeminist gaze that is based on self-surveillance but masked through narratives of self-empowerment is heightened due to the fact that most young middle-class Euro-American women carry cameras with them everyday. Women participants on wedding blog forums who “pleasurably view and comment on photography sessions, dresses and women’s bodies” have been theorised by Michele White through theories of a “lesbian gaze”(White, 2015, p.109). The performances in this research mostly perform for a type of postfeminist gaze, where performing agency and empowerment are entwined in self-looking.

Positions of spectatorship become multiple and fragmented when dealing with online performance. The works in this thesis incorporate multiple platforms and spaces in attempts at uncovering and interrupting systems of regulation where young women perform through coded norms of acceptability. They expand on practices of intermedial and screen-based performances by incorporating social media platforms. Drawing on theories of interaction and haptic visibility I explore how these practices consider spectator experiences both online and in the public presentation of the work.

In *The Language of New Media* Lev Manovich considers the imprisonment by mobile devices, these predictions of a world consumed by mobile devices and wireless Internet have surely materialised. “We will carry our prisons with us-not in order to blissfully confuse representations and perceptions (as in cinema), but rather always to “be in touch,” always connected, and always “plugged-in”. The retina and the screen will merge” (Manovich, 2001, p.113). In *Carnal Thoughts* (2004) Vivian Sobchack describes how our relationships with technology have transformed us into embodied subjects where expressive technology has also become perceptive: “expressing and extending us in ways we never thought possible, radically transforming not merely our comprehension of the world but

¹⁶Koffman, et al., (2015) use the “selfie gaze” to describe how charitable acts of uploading selfies onto humanitarian websites only service those in the act of charity rather than those receiving charitable donations. This humanitarian act “outlines a highly narcissistic form of caring for the suffering of others, one in which the spectator/donor remains centre stage and is not invited to turn her camera or thoughts to those that need help.

also our apprehension of ourselves" (Sobchack, 2004, p.135). Our apprehension of ourselves or our perceptions of ourselves have been transformed as technology not only creates passive spectators¹⁷ but active participants, the screen no longer only projects an image onto us (as in cinema), but enables us to project our images onto others, expanding our self-perception, and quite literally turning the screen into the retina. In her 1976 text *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism* Rosalind Krauss discusses the 'medium' of video in art practice as not only a material or physical apparatus but as a 'medium' in the parapsychological sense, as a mode of telepathy or extra sensory perception. Krauss's theories come from a history of video art that typically display the artist's body manipulating the materiality of the screen using it as a mirror. Moving between a reflective space and a reflexive space considering the screen as a mirror being *reflective* as opposed to the screen as a window or *reflexive*- narcissistic and at the same time autoscopic.¹⁸ Using the virtual screen and online social networks as spaces to present the self or a two-dimensional image of the self can be both reflexive and reflective, on one hand it's a space to present (a window) but it is also a place in which we receive criticism or praise (a mirror). The artists' use of the screen as a medium is an intentional dissection of the very medium itself, both as a physical object and as medium of representation. Krauss uses a Lacanian analogy of the process of psychoanalysis being "one of breaking the hold of this fascination with the mirror; and in order to do so the patient comes to see the distinction between his lived subjectivity and the fantasy projections of himself as object" (Krauss, 1976, p.58). The technology of the screen provides a way of mirroring but this mirroring is disjointed, interrupted by its own physicality and offering a reflexive rather than reflective response; utilizing the screen as a mirror offers a way of creating new subjectivities to the performer.

¹⁷ Judith Mayne is critical of the dualistic definitions of spectatorship as either complacent or critical stating that cinema spectatorship has been misunderstood (Mayne, 1993, p.4). For instance the duality in Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" essay between the active male gaze and the passive female object of the gaze. Although Mulvey addresses the limits of her investigation due to the omission of a female gaze in her essay "Afterthoughts" (1989), Mayne accuses her of replicating "the very terms under investigation".

¹⁸ autoscopia (aw-tos-kōpi) n. the experience of seeing one's whole body as though from a vantage point some distance away. It can be a symptom in epilepsy. A Dictionary of Nursing. 2008. Encyclopedia.com. 21 Jun. 2014 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

In *Screens, Viewing Media and Installation Art* (2010), Kate Mondloch offers an insight into the viewer's relationship with the screens in media art installation. Mondloch investigates the importance of relationships between the body and the screen as experienced in an installation setting, proposing that viewers are "screen subjects". One major point she makes is that "there is a critical imperative to recognize the ways in which screens and conditions of screen-based viewing 'matter' in both contemporary art and our digital everyday" (Mondloch, 2010, intro xxi.). Considering the spectator in art installation Mondloch describes the spaces created in the gallery by mass media screens as "warped spaces" where "virtual and actual screen-based spaces that transform the spatial dynamics of art and media spectatorship" (Mondloch, 2010, p.63). Moving towards the interactive screen created by digital technology Mondloch states:

the computer screen's new connective possibilities further a tension of spectatorship [that the spectator is caught in a] tug of war between being 'both here *and* there' – psychologically and physically invested simultaneously in the physical gallery space and in screen spaces- and being 'neither here *nor* there'-being overcome by so many screen-reliant spaces as to be effectively prevented from being consciously present in any of them (Mondloch, 2010, p.79).

This 'being here and there' simultaneously can sum up how everyday relationships with new screen technology plays with subjectivities. One is neither here nor there but in two places at once in a state of liminality, acting or performing online as a virtual copy of a physical self.

In *Self/Image* (2006) Amelia Jones investigates "aspects of embodiment and subjectivity using the televisual screen." (Jones, 2006, p.138) Describing 'televisual' as "any work that exploits the intimate texture of the video, television, or computer monitor – its skin like grain- to convey aspects of embodiment to viewers in galleries and in other official art world settings or at home" (Jones,

2006, *ibid*). Jones is interested in how screens activate the viewer in a space, not that it creates an ultimate otherness, where the body is rejected or obsolete, but in terms of Katherine Hayles' definition that "bodies can never be made of information alone" (Jones, 2006, *ibid*). Jones is also interested in the breaking of binary readings and oppositional structures of subjectivity which reinforce "racially, sexually and class-determined hierarchies", calling for a move to engage with "televisual bodies in ways that encourage rather than suppress this potential for activation, grasping our own objectivity and otherness while embracing the subjectivity of the other" (Jones, 2006, p.139). Being here and there, physically and psychologically and being aware of our physical bodies as we view televisual bodies, has potential to activate a sense of hyper-awareness in the spectator.

Mike Featherstone talks about the body that is experienced through still two-dimensional images and also the body as experienced through moving images, or "the body without image" (Featherstone, 2010, 193-221). In this Featherstone describes artworks such as Bill Viola's *Anima* where one minute of footage is slowed down to 21 minutes, or Douglas Gordan's *24-hour psycho*, as a way to explain how:

Video and digital art has the ability to fragment the still image and which shows the capacity of new media to provide a technical expansion of self-affection, an overabundance of affective information normally unavailable to perception, to reveal a more intense experience of subjectivity (Featherstone, 2010, p.212).

The image of the body for Featherstone has become a "process" (Featherstone, 2010, p.199).

In *The Virtual Window* Anne Friedberg addresses the materiality/virtuality of the screen and the mobility/immobility of the spectator. Friedberg offers a number of different theories about the screen and an historical overview of the 'virtual window', the virtual in her terms is a metaphor, not necessarily visual but a

transfer “from one plane of meaning to another... that appears functionally or effectively *but not formally* of the same materiality as what it represents” (Friedberg, 2006, p.11). Looking at the screen as a virtual window, a frame that represents *but not formally* a type of reality, reiterates Jones’ and Hayles’ distinction that the body will always be separate from the screen; the ability to exist in virtual reality does not negate the fact the we still inhabit bodies, we can never escape that. Does mobile technology; social media, self-imaging and image sharing online affect our bodies or our experience of how we view our bodies? As Friedberg states: “The very term ‘spectatorship’ has lost its theoretical pinions– as screens have changed, so have our relations to them” (Friedberg, 2006, p.178) and in this way the spectator is more than just a passive subject.

Michele White works on retrieving the term spectator, analysing the body of the Internet user and its virtual reality as well as its physical reality. Quite literally, White is interested in how the seated body performs in its position in front of a screen (different to the mobility offered by the screens in art installation as theorised by Kate Mondloch and Amelia Jones among others) and how the home or office computer produces bodies that are slouched in front of a monitor for eight hours a day. Acknowledging that cyberspace offers users the ability to navigate a space, and most Internet users are guilty of using physical language such as ‘back, forward and home’ to describe movements online, the spectator still inhabits a physical body that sits and slouches and needs feeding and exercise. White provides new ways to consider the spectator of the Internet, one who has *less* control than is sold to them by web companies, web-cam performers and digital art works. Through forms of address on websites, spectators are led to believe they are the ones in control of navigating their way, but in fact the limited choices (for instance in selecting gender descriptions or titles on sign-up forms such as Mrs., Mr., Ms.) reveal the shallow depths of these sites. The limitations of choice that imply subjectivity are then an effect within an interactive digital environment, where the act of ‘naming’ is actually the act of ‘taking a name’. This reinforces Butler’s theories of performativity as constituted culturally and not

individually (Cover, 2012, p.177-193), and also Haraway's analogy of the "Informatics of Domination" (Haraway, 1991, p.161). This is a step further from the materiality of the screen and the position of the spectator to considering the Internet spectator's control or lack thereof not as an active participant but as a passive participant in online spaces.

Following on from Judith Mayne,¹⁹ White believes the position of the spectator can be read as more "complicated" than dualistic definitions "which focus on the ways spectators are constructed by the technologies and cultural narratives, and to indicate that resistance is difficult but possible" (White, 2006, p.9). This brings together earlier mentioned sociological research and feminist theory, which encourages a Deleuzian philosophy of breaking away from binary readings of relationships between the body and image as self/other or subject/object through 'becoming' or 'deterritorialising'. White employs Deleuze's theories of 'folding' and 'doubling' to locate a reading of artistic renderings of the body on screen as a reproduction of the self, or an-Other "non-self".²⁰ "Folding prevents the articulation of distinctions between subjects and objects and a cohesive spectatorial position" (White, 2006, p.179). Folding also implies a feminine mode of viewing. White describes how male programmers who discuss wanting to tone up their bodies as engaging in feminine acts of spectatorship which confuse typical notions of masculine and feminine behaviour stereotypes. Further to these feminine behaviours, the programmers' fat body that touches itself as it sits folded at the computer exhibits a play on feminist interpretation of the female body touching itself (Irigaray) as empowering. White looks at these spectatorial positions between body and computer screen as relationships that complicate traditional notions of spectatorship.

¹⁹ "The term "spectator" indicates some level of distrust in fully separating the subject from people. In Internet and computer viewing, the forms of spectatorship articulated by the technologies and representations are constantly acted out by using the system (White, 2006, p.7).

²⁰ "It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an 'I,' but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non- Self"(White, 2006, p.179).

In *Digitizing Race* (2008), Lisa Nakamura references John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) when considering opposing binaries produced online. Nakamura states that: 'Women and people of colour are both subjects and objects of interactivity; they participate in digital racial formation via acts of technological appropriation, yet are subjected to it as well' (Nakamura, 2008, p.16). Nakamura is interested much in the same way as White, in how Internet users produce digital images of the body, rather than an examination of the interface she explores the Internet as a "platform for digital visual culture" (Nakamura, 2008, p.9). Nakamura uses the example of singer Jennifer Lopez' 1999 music video *If you had my love*, where a Latino woman is presented on an interactive network screen, inviting the white male user to navigate through her world via a joystick, clicking on different rooms where the woman performs for webcams, knowingly being watched. Nakamura describes Lopez in this video as an "object of interactivity".

In her book *Women Making Art*, Marsha Meskimmon states:

work that confronts the scopic objectification of woman has much to contribute to the reformulation of visual culture in our society, but even more subtly, reiterating the bodily locus of subjectivity emphasizes the role of the senses in knowledge production, thus connecting aesthetics with sexed specificity and difference (2003, p.72)

Kate Mondloch states:

media art practice and criticism that is cognisant of the interimplicated relationships between screen objects, screen spaces, and viewing bodies is better prepared to confront the challenges (artistic, ethical or otherwise) of the shifting connections among them (Mondloch , 2010, p.94).

Drawing on the concepts introduced here the chapters in this thesis highlight how social media spaces often work to regulate certain codes of feminine beauty that are aligned with stereotypes of white heteronormative femininity. The practices in this study embody this subject on social media through strategies of performance and interaction, online and in the gallery. The aims of the works are to challenge assumptions attached to these bodies through subversive acts. Based on these case studies and through the interrogation of my own practice it is clear that performing these coded subjectivities online requires an understanding of the temporal and contextual implications social networks impose. In this way it is critical that artists find strategies in the construction of spectatorial positions in order to control the subversive intentions in the work.

In thinking through how the reader could access the works in this thesis I have included QR Codes and hyperlinks. These codes can be scanned using a QR Code scanner app, available to all smart phones through various apps or through computer screens using websites such as <https://webqr.com/>. Alternatively the reader can follow the hyperlinks under the image.

Chapter One

Chapter One is an historical look at practices from the 1980s and 1990s. These artworks pre-date social media as we know it today. Theoretically this chapter looks at Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* and cyberfeminist debate at the time. Here I introduce the origins of feminist theory around social constructions of digital subjectivities of women. In the 1980s Lynn Hershman Leeson, an artist with a history of performing female masquerade, explored the tensions between the subject 'woman' on screen and the spectator of the screen. She created interactive CD-ROM works that invited spectators to physically interact and drive narratives of female characters playing with the tension of control between spectator and screen subject. The characters that Hershman Leeson created represented a typical white female subject seen in cinema and television of the time. *Lorna*, the paranoid hermit who is controlled by what she watches on television, and *Marion* the sexual

temptress calling gallery goers to her by tapping on the screen. Interface, surface and touch are a huge part of Hershman Leeson's work. Enabling the spectator to experience the work through touch rather than merely through sight highlights the role the body plays in the work, both the body of the performer and the body of the spectator. That the spectator becomes aware of their being complicit in this "viewing", tapping, scrolling, crouching, sitting all reflect and affect the viewing experience and the experience of viewing another body on screen. Similarly I look at VNS Matrix's work from the 1990s in terms of their ironic use of video games and language associated with the feminine. In drawing from the French *l'écriture féminine*, these net artists re-appropriated derogatory terms used against women such as cunt and slut to empower the characters of their games who fight the patriarchal "big daddys" of the web. Under the umbrella of cyberfeminism these artists created works online, in the gallery and on the street as forms of political attack against the male dominated web culture. I approach the works in terms of their intent and how they create embodied experiences for the spectators through physical interaction and multiple forms of interaction.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two takes a closer look at how the self-representation of bodies is affected by the structures of online interaction. Early theories of text-based interaction through MUDs (Multi User Domain) opened up spaces where individuals were not bound by the codes tied to their bodies but could perform as any identity they chose. These text-based interactions enabled users to occupy identities as far away from their everyday existence as they liked. Sherry Turkle draws on postmodernist theories of the self, describing these selves as "decentred, fluid, non-linear, and opaque" (1995, p.17). Users of multi-player domains and simulation games such as *The Sims* could choose their 'second selves' to be richer, a lot younger, thinner, and better dressed (Turkle, 2011, xx). The codes that are used in these simulations to make a 'better self' were often aligned with mainstream notions of beauty and success, and were often modelled on stereotypes seen in films, video games and novels (Nakamura, 2002, p.61).

These social constructs of identity created within mass media affect how individuals project themselves. This repetition of cultural signifiers works to maintain norms within gendered, raced and classed subjects. Susanna Paasonen's 2005 book *Figures of Fantasy* addresses structures online through "the norms and conditions for articulating gender" (p.7). In this study Paasonen analyses how certain online spaces reproduce norms through the use of common knowledge assumptions of gender. In this chapter I look at examples of how the frames and structures of online social networks dictate how performances by women are regulated within common knowledge assumptions of gender. In my case studies I analyse how notions of agency, authenticity, and control are applied to the everyday performances of female subjects online. Being in-control of ones image when shared online is described in how webcam operators control who sees what, however the female body is subject to regulations by these networks and has no control over how these performances are read or the context in which they are received. This chapter highlights how readings and regulations of the female body online work within narrow frameworks that are aligned with common knowledge assumptions and norms of appropriate bodies.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three follows on from this discussion with a closer examination of the types of female subject specifically explored in my own art practice. From looking at how artists created works that challenged systems of digital representation through interaction in Chapter One and how social network sites and the frames that represent online regulate and control gendered norms in Chapter Two. Here I focus specifically on the concept of 'new femininities' and look at the performance of female gender online by young white women through a postfeminist lens. I use Rosalind Gill's concept of postfeminist sensibilities as a theoretical framework with which to explore performances on social media that comply with this sensibility and how these spaces conjure up practices of "self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline" through the "dominance of a makeover paradigm", "the re-sexualisation of women's bodies" and "an emphasis upon consumerism and the

commodification of difference” (Gill, 2007a, p.149). I focus on specific popular practices that perform these postfeminist scripts. Large trends such as the #nomakeupselfie confuse notions of agency as in one way the trend raised funds for charity but in another vein re-enforced a norm that all women wear make-up and that it was brave to appear without. I see this trend as a repetition of gendered norms. The rewarding of such a subversive act does not display repetition with difference but reterritorialises the act as a norm. I also look at YouTube vloggers²¹ engaged in practices of haul videos and makeovers that are obsessively engaged in consumption. Famous vloggers’ videos are endorsed by brands and these videos are replicated by young women who purchase items in order to get noticed or achieve similar fame, tying acts of empowerment in with acts of consumption. The vlogger videos tend to come across as authentic but in truth the videos are sponsored thus confusing notions of authenticity with advertising. This subliminal advertising leads to repetition, which in turn echoes Gill’s analysis of postfeminist sensibility as a focus on consumerism and a makeover paradigm.

The case studies in this chapter focus on two similar performances by young women online exploring how agency and authenticity is rewarded through different frames. One performance created as a fake the other as real. Essena O’Neill an “Instafamous” microcelebrity²² achieved Instagram fame through posting images of her sunny, beach life in Australia. Popular on the site from the age of thirteen, O’Neill was sponsored by companies to endorse their products on her page. In 2015 O’Neill, struck by how ‘fake’ her online existence was in comparison to her lived reality exposed these truths by changing the captions on her Instagram images. O’Neill received praise but also backlash, and all endeavours online after this reveal were short lived and O’Neill disappeared from social media. In a similar performance artist Amalia Ulman used Instagram to perform three stages of the female subject she saw played out on Instagram. After

²¹ A vlogger is similar to a blogger in that they share online however they do so through video, a video-blogger.

²² Terri Senft describes the micro-celebrity as “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (Senft, 2012, p.1).

three months Ulman revealed the premise behind the work and received instant fame through the circulation of her performance. I have placed these two performances together to look at how authenticity and agency work on Instagram. Ulman's self-conscious performance was created as an experiment to reveal the constructed nature of Instagram images and also to see how gullible her audience could be. Ulman was able to keep up the rouse although advised by galleries to stop posting, as she would not be taken seriously. O'Neill benefited from her performance for years, however her continued eating disorders and depression were an effect of this performance. O'Neill's public breakdown and revealing of her "true self" ultimately drove her off social media. The fiction of Ulman's performance was more digestible as a concept, her construction of this female subject as an ironic and rhetorical subject drew attention to highlight how 'false' these performances are and how easy it is for the public to believe what they see on Instagram. O'Neill's performance was tied up in commercial fame and she was a product of this postfeminist double entanglement. I am not saying that these performances are the same thing; by placing them together I want to raise questions about authenticity and notions of real selves on social media. Ulman's clever tactics of performance fooled a lot of people and exposing these myths showed how easy people are fooled, but what does this say about how these performances are received? Framing these neoliberal subjects as consumers of postfeminist ideals exposes how young women are regulated and rewarded when following the codes of "appropriate" performances of 'new femininities'.

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four I focus on specific art practices that employ postfeminist masquerade as feminist art intervention on social media. The works in this chapter all centre on the performance of teen girl subjectivities. As seen in the preceding chapters, I have highlighted practices on social media where youth and specific norms of feminine beauty are rewarded. I have framed these performances around theories of postfeminist sensibilities. This chapter looks at the trope of the teen girl and what being a girl actually means in a culture where grown women are labelled

'girls'. Amalia Ulman states that in the media the girl never gets old she just gets replaced (Ulman, 2015). I am interested here in what it means when women artists in their twenties take on this subjectivity and perform online 'as if' they are teenagers. Drawing on Braidotti's "philosophy as if" (1996, p.2) and the politics of parody I examine the intentions behind the performance by these artists as forms of feminist intervention. "In the politics of parody women do not disavow fetishistic representation but affirm a subject that is not grounded in the idea of feminine nature and capable of moral and ethic agency" (Braidotti, 1996, p.4). How do these feminist performances parodying the teen girl work to affirm these subjects? How do they disavow fetishistic representation as they blatantly take part in the modes of representation they are challenging?

Chapter Five

Chapter Five takes its starting point from Rebecca Schneider's theories on how the nature of frames pornographise the images in them. This chapter is interested in performing sexual liberation as a form of female empowerment on social media. Previous chapters looked at how bodies are implicated online through socially constructed narratives of appropriateness and femininity. Evans, et al., (2010), state how subversive acts of sexuality should be read as "intelligible acts" otherwise they are read as another repetition of a norm. In terms of drag the authors state that "readability is essential to the gender troubling of drag, in as much as 'passing' as the opposite gender would do little to destabilise sex/gender binaries"(ibid). The works presented in this chapter are read as subversive in their intention due to the feminist intentions of the artists. The works are also read via arguments around agency online specific to the sexualisation of young women²³ or that agency can be found through subversive performances of female sexuality online. These subversions are read against codes of what are deemed 'norms' of appropriate behaviour and norms associated with pornography. The subversion of such norms brings up issues of representation. The performed sexualities by these

²³ See, Gill, (2011); McRobbie, (2007); Attwood (2011); Paasonen (2010); Evans et al.(2010); White (2006)

artists are all aligned with heterosexual representations of female sexuality, this chapter aims to find subversive strategies that work as performances of agency defying binary norms of appropriate and inappropriate female behaviour.

Chapter Six

Throughout this research I analyse the practices of female artists within the category of heteronormative white femininity. I show how social media works as a space that can both regulate and reward performances of normative femininity. Looking at tropes of 'new femininities' as described as products of postfeminist neoliberal ideology I frame art practices in terms of their intention as feminist interventions and look at strategies incorporated through online and physical performance as methods of subversion. Visions of cyborg subjectivities and post human nomadic figurations offer theoretical frameworks with which to consider how these performances might reconsider what figure represents the female subject online or what constitutes such a subject. Personally, I make work that challenges notions of what a woman is or how feminine beauty is represented through white, thin, hetero-normative figures. These figures of fantasy are created through repeated norms and notions of common knowledge. However, for me to challenge these norms when my body is so heavily coded leads to the issue of the repetition of norms without difference. I consider the subject of my work an ironic figure, however unlike Haraway's ironic cyborg, my body still tied to my gender, 'race' and class.

Along with my theoretical enquiry and the case studies, I used the practice element of this research to consider ways of performing gender that I felt structurally influenced by through my interactions on social media and through considering the construction of a postfeminist subject. I developed a series of selfie videos filmed on my phone as I performed as my online character *SweetHeart*. *SweetHeart* is an ironic figure her name created as a rhetorical

strategy. In the selfie video series I used the live streaming app Persicope²⁴ and posed to camera for extended durations. This performance of a postfeminist masquerade seeks out responses and uses duration, temporality, stillness, and space as strategies of subversion. The works were re-presented in the gallery and are accessible in the thesis through scanning QR Codes or following links. The framing and contexts of these works is hugely important, I have made them accessible here as I want the reader to experience them on their device or computer. The relationship between the spectator and the performer is heightened due to the haptic and tactile connections made between spectator and device. The context I present the videos in the gallery changes how they are experienced again. This multiple and dispersed spectatorship implies that being in control and having agency as a performer online does not change the context in which they are experienced.

As in the work discussed in Chapter One the concept of creating a piece that isolates the viewer and makes them complicit in the viewing operates as a rhetorical and subversive strategy. In a gallery/online-based performance developed over a year I created an installation that brought together all of the strategies and concerns examined in the research. *SweetHeart* opens up a space between subject and screen. My attempts at performing authenticity through masquerade in *SweetHeart* are explicitly constructed to the point of drag. My use of green screen in the live performance was to intensify the sense of simulation. This set-up attempted to place the spectator in a position of complicit viewing, enabling different viewing positions and multiple contexts for the spectator to grab²⁵. The works extend theories of "haptic visuality" described by Laura U. Marks (1998), and "televisual bodies" by Amelia Jones (2006) to explore performances informed by and performed on social media. The works in this chapter explore the

²⁴ Periscope is an app created by Twitter that enables users to broadcast live across the globe to be viewed and commented on live by other users. Broadcasts are linked to twitter accounts and are posted to twitter pages therefore reaching a much wider audience. The videos are saved on the app for 24 hours, after which they are deleted. Users are able to save videos to their devices.

²⁵ I use the term grab here in relation to Terri Senft's description of viewing performers on screen through the act of grabbing rather than watching (2008).

limited and the unlimited ways in which spectators can view and experience social media centred performance. Context and conditions of viewing are crucial with these works and through a critical examination of social media-based works context becomes even more important if we are to challenge the reading of these female subjects online.

Throughout the thesis, mainly in each of the chapter conclusions, I relate the theories discussed to my own practice. I have written more extensively on my studio practice and the development of the main works discussed in chapter six and in appendix a. The aim is for the reader to see how the practice developed and to allow room to describe the works in more detail. This method of referencing creates a clearer picture of how theory and practice co-related throughout this project.

CHAPTER ONE

Strategies of Subverting Traditional Female Screen Subjects in Early New Media Feminist Art

This chapter introduces examples of seminal feminist artworks from the 1980s and 1990s that explore the representation of women in new media and the Internet at the time. The intention of this chapter is to create a historical framework that introduces the complexities within feminist art and theory relating to the construction of female subjectivity online and in new media. The works interrogate how certain codes of female subjectivity are made visible and exploited on screen and endeavour to deconstruct these ideas by subverting the medium of their exploitation. These 'screens' comprise of television and the Internet. The works here focus on interactivity as a tool to connect the spectator to the bodies and subjects on screen through physical engagement with the works. Erkki Huhtamo states that it is no coincidence that so many women artists work in this field due to "women's historical exclusion from technology and their simultaneous encapsulation or hybridisation with the machine (as telephone operators, typists, 'automated' housewives etc.), in a male dominated society"(2009, p.200).

I begin by discussing two works by Lynn Hershman Leeson from the 1980s, *Lorna* (1983) and *Deep Contact* (1984-98). In these works I explore Hershman Leeson's depiction of stereotypical representations of screen-based female subjects and her use of interactive artworks that reflect on to the spectator making them complicit in activating the work. The two female tropes in these works are the sexual temptress and the encapsulated subject controlled by her television.

I then introduce the work of cyberfeminist art group VNS Matrix whose interactive work *All New Gen* (1994/95) explicitly drew from Donna Haraway's 1985 *A Cyborg Manifesto* in their ironic attempts to challenge the world of 'game boys' and the male dominated games and technology world. I expand on these

works to look at cyberfeminism as a theoretical strategy in revealing the inequalities of representation in new media technology and cyberspace. Conflicting definitions of cyberfeminism and the inequalities within the representation of women who are not white, western and middle-class complicate how cyberfeminists talk about liberating female subjectivity through the networks or "Big Daddy Mainframe". Throughout this chapter I engage with the irony in Haraway's cyborg and Rosi Braidotti's post-human simulators as theoretical underpinnings to the practices discussed. I also look at how through performing these alternative versions of 'woman' these artists challenged assumptions of what a woman is and how indefinable a subject it is.

Cyborg Theories and Posthuman Simulators

Donna Haraway's 1985 essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* is a well-quoted text in the field of women and technology. Although originally written in 1985 the text is very much relevant today as binaries of gendered identity are still very much defined and played out on social media. Haraway's polemic was a rhetorical strategy that used the ironic vision of the cyborg as a tool to think through dominant and binary narratives of subjectivity. In a response to dominant readings and renderings of 'race', 'gender', 'class' and 'sexuality', Haraway describes fractured identities and affinity over identity as a way to effectively confront these dominant narratives. As Haraway states:

There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female...Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experiences of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism (Haraway, 1991, p.155)

Haraway speaks of a move from "old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks... called the informatics of domination"(Haraway, 1991, p.161). The first move from old hierarchal dominations is from representation to simulation (ibid). Representation, in Haraway's reading, can be coded as 'natural' or based in

materiality. Simulation is not based on essential properties but is produced through rates of flow and information. Jean Baudrillard describes simulation as “no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard, 1994, p.1). We are no longer looking at representations of the body but a simulation of a body, a self-fabricated re-working of the physical form. This dream of a post-gender chimera allows us to engage in a fantasy of how things ‘could’ be; a world with genesis, without the father and mother; without ties to the body. Haraway’s cyborg is a work of fiction, the works in this chapter aim to challenge dominant narratives within the representation of the subject ‘woman’ from the traditional figuration as object of vision.

Claudia Springer found it ironic how debates around gender and sexuality find expression in the cyborg. Drawing on Foucault’s concept that man is a recent invention²⁶, Springer looks at the construction of the cyborg as one that has become subject to dispute and “depending on one’s stake in the outcome, one can look to the cyborg to provide either liberation or annihilation” (Springer, 1999, p.53).

Rosi Braidotti draws on Haraway’s concept of the cyborg and offers a new materialist,²⁷ postmodern, post-human simulator, which she conceives of as the post-human body. This body for Braidotti is “an artificially reconstructed body” the three examples of post-human simulator bodies from her paper *Cyberfeminism with a Difference* (1996) are Jane Fonda, Elizabeth Taylor and Dolly Parton. Each of these bodies, along with another great simulator– Michael Jackson, has in some way been enhanced by technology to portray “hyper-real gender identity” (Braidotti, 1996, p. 2). This hyper-real simulator is a product of Western consumerist society, and in Braidotti’s terms, this hyper reality intensifies class relations (ibid, p. 3). The currency traded in this commodified capital is,

²⁶ Springer (1999) claims Foucault’s statement ‘man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end’ prefigures the cyborg. The cyborg entity brings to light issues around sexuality and gender that are not necessarily new but can work to benefit or damage those depending on their stakes of involvement.

²⁷ Braidotti describes New Materialism as: “a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power” (Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012, p.21).

according to Braidotti: "body fluids: the cheap sweat and blood of the disposable workforce throughout the third world; but also, the wetness of desire of first world consumers as they commodify their existence into over-saturated stupor" (ibid). This over-saturated stupor is the obsession with images, and images of the self, the body, turning visualisation into "the ultimate form of control" (ibid).

This reliance on visualisation and the notion of an enhanced body/image based on commodified versions of gendered identity and whiteness as "the undisputed and utterly final standards of beauty" indicates "that the shifting of conventional boundaries between the sexes and the proliferation of all kinds of differences through the new technologies will not be nearly as liberating as the cyber-artists and Internet addicts would want us to believe" (Braidotti, 1996, p.7). One way in which feminist artists are working to deconstruct the stereotype of femininity is through mimetic performance and in what Braidotti terms the "politics of parody". Braidotti states:

These artists go on functioning in society as female subjects in these post-metaphysical days of decline-of gender dichotomies, act 'as if' Woman was still their location. In so doing, however, they treat femininity as an option a set of available poses, a set of costumes rich in history and social power relations, but not fixed or compulsory any longer (Braidotti, 1996, p.8).

Through addressing an historical notion of 'Woman' and by employing repetition and mimetic performance, feminist artists are working towards a break away from traditional gendered dichotomies. As new technology and screen media seems to be re-enforcing certain female stereotypes such as in the white hyper-real Fonda and Parton, it is the work of feminist artists to use this technology in an attempt to deconstruct the very systems presenting these images in a culture where visualisation is the "ultimate form of control" (Braidotti, 1996, p.3). "Women need to repossess subjectivity by reducing their confinement to the body, thus making an issue of deconstructing the body" (Braidotti, 1996, p.8). Of course to speak of 'Woman' as referring to all women makes no sense, there is not one known subject 'Woman', so for Braidotti the feminist strategy of defining these

terms is to separate the subject 'Woman' from the feminist subject position. This critical distance lets feminist theorists and artists explore the representation and institution of 'Woman' as constructed within patriarchal history. Braidotti uses Teresa deLauretis' term of the "essential difference" between woman as representation and woman as experience (Braidotti, 1994, p.164). It is also important that this subject woman is not reduced to one known thing, this is where "attention to the *situated* as opposed to the universalistic nature of statements is the key idea"(Braidotti, 1994, p.163).

In *Technologies of the Gendered Body* (1996) Anne Balsamo also draws on Haraway's cyborg, investigating how the body is materially redesigned through the application of newly developed technologies. She identifies Haraway's "informatics of domination" as events that "signal the way in which the body is produced, inscribed, replicated, and often disciplined in postmodernity" (Balsamo, 1996, p.3). But Balsamo's cyborg investigates how technology works in a way that re-inscribes historically, socially and culturally formed ideals, thus affecting the materiality of the body, which could be seen as reinforcing the very binaries Haraway aims to diminish.²⁸ Springer's statement above on the cyborg providing either liberation or annihilation based on one's stake in the outcome is useful here. There is no irony or 'as if' in Balsamo's cyborgs, they are the same as the bodies of the celebrity hyper-real simulators Braidotti calls "a surface of inscriptions of social codes" (Braidotti, 1996, p.2). Female artists using their bodies or the female body as subjects in the work run the risk of re-inscribing rather than liberating the representation of 'woman'. For the purposes of this investigation I am interested in Balsamo's points that address the materiality of the body that is presented through our avatars or online presentations, and which raise questions as to whether the body is effected through cause and effect or does the body 'become' through its digital simulation. Balsamo also draws on Judith Butler's argument that gender is culturally formed, stating that "the body" is a process and a product of social, cultural and historical production (Balsamo, 1996, p.3). Balsamo's use of Haraway's

²⁸ A contemporary example of this is Huffington Post writer Rosie Cherrington reported that Harley Street plastic surgeon Dr Massimiliano Marcellino has stated that around 10 out of 15 of patients will have an instagram folder full of image goals, and have even brought images of snapchat filters as examples of how they wish to look (Cherrington, 2016).

cyborg is not to reinforce traditional binaries, rather she is careful not to write the female body out of feminist discourse, stating that the female body as a cyborg is a site witnessing “struggles between the systems of social order”, and that within these struggles “new forms of gendered embodiment emerge which on the one hand may display inherited signs of traditional dichotomous gender identity, but which also reinvent gender identity in totally new ways” (Balsamo, 1996, p.39).

Braidotti's treatment of the cyborg is similar, this performing as 'Woman' through mimetic and performative behaviours in order to create new becomings and erasing traditional meanings of an essentialised 'woman' or common knowledge notions of natural femininity. One of Balsamo's cyborg examples is the body under the technological gaze, the technology is plastic surgery and the gaze is that of the surgeon, who “refashions the material body to reconstruct it in keeping with culturally determined ideals of Western feminine beauty” (Balsamo, 1996, p.58). The premise of my investigation is not to look at how bodies are transformed through plastic surgery. Rather my investigation is in to how bodies that are gendered female perform the subject woman online, using apps, visual and textual language, specific framing techniques, new photo technology and how artists use the same technologies as acts of subversion in gallery spaces and the public sphere.

Becoming the Subject 'Woman'

Resisting “Tired Binaries” in Early New Media and Interactive Art

In this chapter and throughout the thesis I use Braidotti's description of becoming the subject 'Woman' within art practices that are not directly linked to the institution of femininity, but rather embody multiple subjectivities in order to fragment links between woman and assumptions of femininity. In attempting to redefine subjectivity Braidotti states that feminist starting points tend to focus on the new materialist, embodied, sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject (Braidotti, 1994, p.3). For Braidotti's becoming-the-subject-Woman it is important to recognise her focus on differences among women through the

politics of location or situated knowledges²⁹. These situated knowledges encourage accountability and recognition of dominant identities and power-formations. Braidotti's examples of a "nomadic engagement with historical essences" are *The History Portraits* (1990) by Cindy Sherman (Figure 1 & Figure 2), which are described as "a stunning mixture of accuracy and irony" (ibid, p.169). In Sherman's portraits we see humour mixed with the grotesque, the images do not try to hide their constructed nature rather the over the top style works in a way to expose this element of identity construction. This is something that runs through the thesis as I look at other more contemporary practices, some are explicitly constructed and obviously masquerade, whilst others operate more subtly and work under disguise questioning understandings of authenticity and subjectivity.



Figure 1. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled # 225* (detail), 1990.
Chromogenic colour print 122 x 84 cm.

²⁹ "I proposed that we interpret the notion of 'situated' knowledge, or the 'politics of location,' not only in spatial terms (class, ethnicity, etc.), but also as a temporal notion" (Braidotti, 1994, p.3).



Figure 2. Cindy Sherman, Untitled #228, 1990.
Chromogenic colour print, 208.4 x 122 cm.

Braidotti's subject is nomadic, a "non-unitary subjectivity...a nomadic, dispersed, fragmented vision, which is nonetheless functional, coherent and accountable, mostly because it is embedded and embodied" (Braidotti, 2006a, p.4). Braidotti's conception of the nomadic "virtual feminine" comes from Luce Irigaray's work on mimesis and states that women must reclaim and represent the subject 'Woman' in their own terms as an exit strategy from phallogocentric definitions of 'Woman' (Braidotti, 2003, p.45). However, Irigaray's theories have been accused of essentialist definitions. Braidotti's interest in them is that it is important for women to try to reclaim the notion of 'woman' as something outside of the phallogocentric regime, and to do this we must explore our history and the body rather than neglect it or refuse to acknowledge it. Braidotti uses Irigaray's "aim to achieve a more symmetrical representation to the differences between both sexes" alongside Deleuze's theories on nomadology as a way to "bypass the parameters of phallogocentric representation altogether" in her "quest for points of exit from phallogocentric modes of thought" (Braidotti, 2003, p.47).

Much in the same way Haraway's cyborg denied dualistic definitions, Braidotti's virtual feminine "critiques dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new flux of self" and defines the feminist subject "as a multiple, complex process (that) is also an attempt to re-think the unity of the subject, without reference to either humanistic beliefs or naive social constructivism" (Braidotti, 2003, p.46). Braidotti's nomadic subject of the virtual does not believe in moving away from gender or sexed identity without "showing the steps and the points of exit from the old gender-polarised system" (Braidotti, 1994, p.170). In the case studies of this thesis and in my own work, there are familiar images of 'Woman' practiced, however *how* they are practiced and the fragmented embodiments they display challenge perceived notions of what a woman is, or should be.

Lynn Hershman Leeson

One artist who is closely linked to notions of the cyborg is Lynn Hershman Leeson. Hershman Leeson's practice started in the 1970s in San Francisco where she was part of the second wave feminist movement and pioneered many forms of digital art making. I will briefly talk here about one of Hershman Leeson's early works *Roberta Breitmore* not as an example of her digital art but to give some background to the concerns in Hershman Leeson's work around the construction of identity. Between 1974-78 Hershman Leeson's practice was focused around the double life performance of the character *Roberta Breitmore* and her own life. *Roberta* was a blonde-haired, white, single woman living alone in San Francisco. She had her own driver's licence, small apartment, and clothing, took part in weight watchers and had her own psychiatrist. *Roberta* advertised in the local newspaper for companionship and a possible housemate. Advertising for a housemate Roberta's advert read: "WOMAN Cauc. seeks bright companion to share rent & interests" (Figure 3). Hershman Leeson's inclusion of gender and skin colour is reflective of a system where identity categories of 'gender', 'race' and 'class' are significant. This ad also reads more like a lonely hearts than a roommate request clearly intending to attract propositions. Hershman Leeson describes the project of *Roberta Breitmore* as representing a fractured identity that both mirrored and reflected her society (Hershman Leeson, 2005, p.33).



Figure 3. Lynn Hershman Leeson, Want Ad, San Francisco Progress, 1974.
Digital Pigment print, 16.7x24.2cm



Figure 4. Lynn Hershman Leeson, Check Book, 1974.
Bound Paper, 15x7.5cm.

As *Roberta* she went on dates with men, once narrowly escaping being solicited by a pimp (she escaped by going into a public toilet and transforming back to Lynn). Hershman Leeson perfectly describes Breitmore as “an interactive vehicle used to analyze culture”(Hershman Leeson, 2005, p.33).



Figure 5. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta and Irwin Meet for the First Time in Union Square Park*, 1975.

Chromogenic print, 25.2x20cm



Figure 6. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta Meets Sydney at Del Coronado Hotel (San Diego)*, 1976.

Digital pigment print, 23.7x18.9cm.

This self-as-other performance is described by Amelia Jones as a product of a postmodern understanding of identity and representation, as simulacral and without an essential core (Jones in Hershman Leeson, 2005, p.107). This echoes Internet theorist Sherry Turkle's postmodern description of living online, which will be discussed further in the chapter. Jones also states how rather than becoming art performer as a way of getting attention like Andy Warhol or Marcel Duchamp, Lynn Hershman Leeson's subtle self-performances:

embraced artifice to explore something profound in the experience of living as a woman in a patriarchal culture. Simulacral self-display, for Cahun and Breitmore/Hershman as women artists, is not a tool or strategy to be adopted and cast off at will. Rather, as a component of feminine masquerade, it is central to female experience in patriarchy (Jones, 2005, p.110).

Jones describes *Roberta* as a “lived subject,” Hershman Leeson created a subject that lived a fictional life in the real world and to this day continues to exist in the art world. *Roberta Breitmore* was an artwork that challenged notions of surveillance, female subjectivity and authenticity in a pre-Internet time. Her existence documented through personal artefacts such as bank cheques, a driver’s license and photographs, an archive of a ‘virtual’ life based on the workings of everyday ‘real life’. These artefacts not only documented her performance as *Roberta* but gave a “contextual portrait of that particular place in time” and the laws that were part of culture and society at that time (Hershman Leeson, 2009, p.232). But does *Roberta* embody the cyborg or the nomadic subject? Hershman Leeson is explicit in her descriptions of *Roberta* as a white woman; this is a mimetic form of investigation. The construction of *Roberta* is so closely documented that the fabrication of her existence becomes as much the character as she is. However, I can’t say that she is a cyborg in the sense that she transcends boundaries of gendered, classed or racialised categorisation. What the *Roberta Breitmore* work does achieve is in creating a character so accepted in society her virtual reality is unquestioned. This is a reflection of a society that privileges the trope of the white, middle class woman despite being a social construction.

Moving on from *Roberta Breitmore*, Hershman Leeson’s practice interrogated the production of identity and female subjectivity within new media. Her interactive works feature women or possible cyborgs stuck in some kind of imprisoning situation that is dictated by the interfaces they inhabit and at the hands of the spectator. The characters in Hershman Leeson’s work embody a kind of cyborg existence in their created fictions and even though *Roberta Breitmore* was an embodied performance the authenticity of her existence is proven through

the various documents and images or simulacra of her life. This is not to say *Roberta* was a cyborg, as in her embodied life she was very much tied to a rigid identity. Hershman Leeson's first creation that existed solely on screen and as part of the network was *Lorna* (1984).

Lorna

Lorna (1984), known as the first interactive video art disc, was created on a CD-ROM. The installation of this work consists of a sitting room environment where the viewer is invited to take a seat in front of the television and use the remote control to play out the story of *Lorna*, the agoraphobic protagonist. *Lorna* is not an Internet-based work however it displays early conditions of viewing subjects on computer screens where viewing is interactive, the work foresees future visions of women on screen and new types of interactive relationships that challenge and reassess concepts of the male gaze³⁰ most frequently discussed in feminist film studies (Mulvey, 1989).

Here I analyse Hershman Leeson's work through her subversive production of female subjectivity and the methods of installation used to induce embodied and intersubjective experiences of the works.

³⁰ Repositioning the spectator into an awareness of their viewing position complicates Mulvey's 1975 (1989) concept of the male fetishistic gaze. Where Mulvey states the darkness of the auditorium isolates the spectator, moving away from the darkness of the cinema to sitting in front of a computer changes the relationship with the screen and the subjects on screen (p.17).



Figure 7. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration.
Installation view at *Civic Radar* exhibition, ZKM Gallery Karlsruhe, 2015.



Figure 8. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration, video still.

The position of the spectator mirrors that of *Lorna* on screen, sitting in a living room watching television. *Lorna* is trapped in an infinite loop of agoraphobic fear and the spectator is positioned watching her as she watches television and the spectator decides her fate through the touch of a button. The video starts out with a menu screen where you are invited to select start and run the disc (Figure 9). From there we see an opening sequence of *Lorna* in her apartment, many of the objects in her apartment are numbered and spectators are encouraged to select them through the numbers on the remote control (Figure 10). By choosing a

number you are then moved to another window, for example if you click on the phone one of three audio pieces play. The spectator can move forward or backwards and in some cases change the speed of the disc thus implying that they have some control over *Lorna's* destiny.

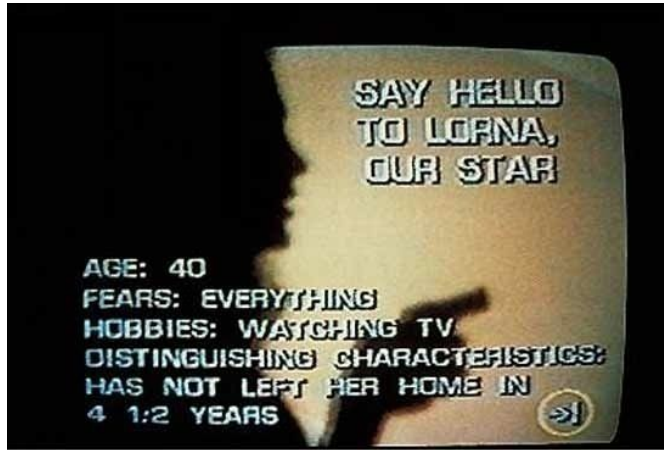


Figure 9. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration, video still.



Figure 10. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration, video still.



Figure 11. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration, video still.

Myths of Interactivity and Positioning the Spectator

However, the disc contains thirty-six chapters and three possible endings: suicide, shooting the television, or moving to LA. Having viewed this work 33 years after it was first made in its current incarnation as a DVD the implied 'interactivity' sometimes fails. I sat with this work a number of times and during one sitting I got stuck before I even started. Playing it in the Whitechapel Gallery at the *Electronic Superhighway* exhibition in 2016 I accidentally hit the 'demo' option and ended up watching a video telling me how to navigate the work rather than actually use it, held back by my unwillingness to ask a member of the gallery staff to help me reset the video, I move on after around five minutes of not interacting. What this situation successfully did was make me aware of my position in the gallery as a spectator, not as empowered spectator but confined and vulnerable. A trait that is commonly noted of Hershman Leeson's works is that the shifting gazes subjugate "regimes of social control" inverting the idea of looking as power (Morse, 1995, p.8). I experienced this shifting gaze even more when visiting *Civic Radar* a retrospective of Hershman Leeson's work at ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany. There is an overwhelming feeling of surveillance and your own physicality, whether I felt this through the sheer number of works that

promote this feeling or my own paranoia of being in the gallery, the works evoke the sensation of being watched.

Lorna is slow and stiff and you don't always select the thing you set out to due to delays in the disc but in the same way that web pages can move and force you to hit a pop-up advert. Lev Manovich talks about the 'Myth of Interactivity' in his 2001 book *The Language of New Media* using the term 'cultural interfaces'³¹ to describe "human-computer-culture interface: the ways in which computers present and allows us to interact with cultural data"(Manovich, 2001, p.80). Manovich describes interaction under a number of headings stating that to call computer media interactive "is meaningless -- it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers"(Manovich, 2001, p.71). To use Manovich's description, *Lorna* is a menu-based interactive multimedia application where "all data already exists before the user accesses it"(Manovich, 2001, p.78).

Lorna is an interactive work in the sense that the work requires a 'user' to press the buttons to decide her fate, however her fate, although multiple, is pre-determined due to the nature of the disc. Hershman Leeson talks of the illusion that *Lorna* is alive or talks back stating that "they depend upon the architectural strategy of the program" (Hershman Leeson, 1990, p 645). However Hershman Leeson's concerns at the time of making *Lorna* were to close off a distance between television and viewer. Hershman Leeson bases this on her "craving for control, a longing for liveness" that was missing in her experience of watching television, a medium she describes as: "by nature fragmentary and incomplete, distanced and unsatisfying; like platonic sex" (ibid., p.644). Hershman Leeson's agenda with *Lorna* was to make the viewer feel in some form of control to the point where "fusion, or transplant occurs"(ibid., p.645). This form of interactivity was an attempt at closing a distance between screen subject and screen viewer that would cause "viewer/participants transgress into an inverse labyrinth of themselves" as they became more aware of the "effects of fear caused by media " (ibid.).

³¹ Cultural interfaces include the interfaces used by the designers of Web sites, CD-ROM and DVD titles, multimedia encyclopaedias, online museums and magazines, computer games and other new media cultural objects (Manovich, 2001, p.64)

Margaret Morse discusses fragmented interactivity and glitches in software as like "the flow of images as Brecht-like distancing that creates a space for reflection"(Morse, 2003, p.24). The space between getting to the next stage and the interrupted image cause the user to become more aware of their physical state in the 'interaction' of the work. Some theorist's claim a form of pleasure can be taken in the fragmented delayed process of interactivity. For instance, in her book *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (2006) Michele White talks of the interruptions caused by networks and technical glitches that happen with interactive technology as a "possible pleasurable masochism of spectatorship", and the limitations of the technology keep the viewer engaged that the possibilities of the fantasy keep users interested (2006, p.70). Similarly in *Death 24x a Second* (2006), Laura Mulvey discusses the shift in cinematic experience from passive spectator to possessive spectator and how advances in viewing technology allow the spectator to control how a film can be watched and experienced. Mulvey states:

The 'fetishistic spectator' becomes more fascinated by image than plot, returning compulsively to privileged moments, investing emotion and 'visual pleasure' in any slight gesture, a particular look or exchange taking place on the screen (Mulvey, 2006, p.165).

Laura U.Marks states that the "denial of depth in vision and multiplication of surface, in the electronic texture of video, has a quality of visual eroticism (Marks, 1998, p.333). Mark's theories of haptic visuality refer to sensory rather than tactile experience, so although the haptic may not be very relevant to these works where they are physically touched, the affective encounter resonates through the spectators presence and participation in the work. *Lorna* in a sense extends notions of haptic visuality, where physical touch engages the spectator even closer to the screen subject. Here, the body on screen is not creating the haptic experience but the closeness of the spectator to the screen activates this feeling instead.

For Hershman Leeson this possessive spectator can only ever be implied, *Lorna* is a reflexive work that "allows individuals to dissolve the division that

separates them from subversive control, and replaces some of the nostalgic longings with a sense of identity, purpose, and hope" (Hershman Leeson, 1990, p.647). However through positioning of the spectator within the installation in an embodied and intersubjective relationship changes conventional dynamics of viewing screen objects.

Lorna as the Subject 'Woman'

In this thesis I am asking questions of contemporary artworks in their intentions, their strategies and their execution. For Hershman Leeson the intent with *Lorna* was to act as a mirror on a society consumed with television subjects highlighting the disconnection between the representations on screen and the viewer's own subjectivity. *Lorna* physically engaged with the spectator provoking physical and embodied experiences. Much like *Roberta Breitmore*, *Lorna* embodies a television representation of 1980s 'Woman', she is white, slim and American. It could be said of *Lorna* that the version of 'Woman' Hershman Leeson produces is a reproduction of what is always already seen on screen and therefore simply repeating the image of the female subjectivity her work aims to challenge. However, *Lorna's* situation is an extreme version of a familiar subject, this emphasis and repetition in the cycle of her pre-empted fate work as a reflexive form of subversion. She is stuck in a never-ending loop, absorbed by the medium of her representation.



Figure 12. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Lorna*, 1983.
Interactive videodisk installation, infinite duration, video still.

Lorna's subjectivity could also be described as a failed woman in terms of her position as a lonely, single, childless woman. But according to Judith Halberstam

"failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development" (Halberstam, 2011, p.3). *Lorna's* media-incited fears cause her to become tied to the house, a traditionally domestic and feminine space. Her fantasies are directly taken from television imagery, such as her dream of (heterosexual) romance, her fear of ageing or aspirations to become a pop star.

Lorna must kill the television to get rid of the reason she is trapped in her apartment, or else she must kill herself, there is just no escaping the bombarding images that keep her trapped in her body and her apartment. Unless *Lorna* embraces the situation and moves to, the home of facade and fakery: LA. She is a woman with limited choices, it's do or die and it is harder to be an outsider than to try and fit in. Hershman Leeson describes the option of moving to LA as "what some people consider the worst option of all" (Hershman Leeson, 2013). *Lorna* is at the mercy of technology, no matter where she turns, and the spectator is the one who decides where she turns.

Lorna could be considered an embodiment of a type of cyborg. Hershman Leeson's practice of identity play and technological control create parallels with her characters and the cyborg of feminist theory. Haraway's cyborg is "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" (Haraway, 1991, p.151). Although this cyborg is an ironic postmodern rejection of biological difference and a confusion of borders and boundaries whereas *Lorna* is visibly a construction of a white woman. Quite explicitly two out of a possible three of *Lorna's* ends are violent, a reference to the militarism of American society, a theme Hershman Leeson has directly addressed in other works.³²

In her manifesto Haraway calls out socialist feminism for its problems in assuming what a woman is and using the term 'woman' as an umbrella term for 'all women'. Haraway states there was "no structural room for race (or for much else) in theory claiming to reveal the construction of the category woman and social group women as a unified or totalizable whole" (Haraway, 1991, p.160). This could relate

³² Hershman Leeson's 1993-94 work *America's Finest* played with violence and imagery where viewers squeeze the trigger of a gun and their image appears in the viewfinder, here the suspect/viewer turned into the victim.

also to LORNA and Herschman Leeson's other works as her protagonists all tend to fit into stereotypical images of white femininity.

"The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (Haraway, 1991, p.163). Haraway's feminist cyborg speaks in tongues, not a universal language for 'all women' (ibid., p.181). The cyborg is hybrid and fragmented, there is no such thing as female and no one fixed notion of woman. In order to embody the cyborg we must embrace fragmented subjectivities, not become the opposite of what we are not. There are no dualisms or binaries, there are systems and tools that need to be seized and rewritten. This notion of a genderless, non-racialized, classless subject is a utopian idea in many ways and the Internet of today still facilitates gendered binaries and the perpetuation of stereotypes among gendered, racialised and classed subjects. This utopian dream of the cyborg is hard to imagine, but an important strategy nonetheless. Braidotti's point of looking closer at historical and situated references in the nomadic subject might work as a more realistic project. It is in the nomadic subject that the mimetic act uses repetition and difference to attempt at imagining new notions of the subject that is woman. Placing *Lorna* in the context of 'female' only works as an ironic representation of the Informatics of domination (Haraway, 1991). I consider the work of *Lorna* as a production of Braidotti's virtual feminine. *Lorna* represents the image of a vulnerable woman but through her lack of control, and repeating the image of woman on screen her invitation for control through interaction reverses roles and mirrors society.

The failure of *Lorna*'s software and its limitations are reflective of future limitations of online identity play which are explored in Chapter Two. Sherry Turkle heralded the multiple identity networking possibilities of early Internet communication however they did not transpire as perhaps her postmodern prophesies had hoped. Turkle uses Victor Turner's phrase 'liminal moments' (Turkle, 1984, p.15) to describe the moment of the MUD (multi user domain), where these virtual communities offered "a dramatic new context in which to think about human identity in the age of the Internet" (Turkle, 1995, p.267). The opportunity to explore 'passing' as another person from a different identity

category was possible in the world of MUDs. Similarly, Gonzalez (2000) quotes Bruce Damer in his book *Avatars!* who heralds life in digital space as your "skin color, race, sex, size, religion or age does not matter" (p.43). However many researchers contested that when gendered and racialised identity came into play certain stereotypes and representations were still very much restricted. Once you choose your identity, the roles you take on within that are limited to the cultural understandings society has of those said identity choices. Jennifer Gonzalez' analysis of net-artworks that offer new figurations of bodies that claim to transcend racial, sexual and gender identities are insufficient and do not achieve their intentions due to users pre-determined assumptions of racial and gender stereotypes (Gonzalez, 2000). Lisa Nakamura states that in role-playing on the Net, identities or avatars were often directly taken from popular media sources like films, video games and novels (Nakamura, 2002, p.59). Paasonen (2005, p.108) disagrees with Turkle and Allucquere Stone's use of Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity, as something that can be turned on and off or that it is merely another form of performing a personality. This could only work if gender was something that one *has* rather than is *constituted by*, Paasonen sees this as a misuse of Butler's gender performativity which is something that is a pre-condition and a construction of power. *Lorna* is an example of pre-programmed gender performativity; she is constituted by social constructions of gender.

If we consider Hershman Leeson's *Lorna* as a mirror on a situation within society rather than an invitation to assume another identity or to 'pass' as *Lorna* we find her character is not perpetuating a type of female subjectivity or woman, rather using a familiar image through virtual repetition in order to question positions of voyeurism, media, surveillance, control and the subject 'Woman'. *Lorna* proposes intersubjective relationships in positioning the spectator as part of the work where the spectator's own subjective position activates new possibilities. This gallery-specific positioning is important to the work, isolating the spectator creates a heightened tension between the two. Morse states that intersubjectivity and interactivity "are not so easily identified as a set of fixed positions" (Morse, 2003, p.22). The subjectivity on screen reflects on to the spectator and vice versa, creating a cyclical relationship. However, as stated in Morse earlier, the glitches in

the technology interrupt this relationship, and serve to decentre the subject where this decentring “creates a space for reflection” (p.24). My personal experience of this glitch was stressful in its reflection, whilst I was drawn in to find out more about *Lorna* I was frustrated at the incompetency of the machine and although I waited for a few minutes I ended up moving on. This in part was due to the fact that there were people wandering around me and also wanted a turn, and my embarrassment in getting stuck. This physical experience of being watched whilst watching has power in considering the role of the spectator and the context and installation of these works. These concepts of positioning the spectator are important in the works explored throughout this thesis.

I don't see *Lorna* as essentialising the notion of 'woman', I position it in thinking about Braidotti's use of “working through the images and representations that the (masculine) knowing subject has created of Woman as Other” as an exit from typical images and understandings of what a woman is (Braidotti, 2003, p45). This is a rhetorical work, it is challenging the spectator to hold a position and once in that position it questions understandings and assumptions of female subjectivity on screen. *Lorna* transgresses assumptions of femaleness, as I stated earlier her situation is failed by societal standards, her violent endings display a type of anti-feminine masculine nature³³.

Deep Contact

The second of Hershman Leeson's works I want to discuss is *Deep Contact*. *Deep Contact* is another first, described as “the first interactive sexual fantasy videodisc” (Shaw & Weibel, 2003, p.221).

³³ “Serving as a fundamental signifier of masculinity, we not only consider violence more the province of men than women, but it is also an activity that inevitably enhances a man's masculinity as much as it it would conversely detract from a woman's femininity” (Neroni, 2005, p.42).



Figure 13. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact, The First Interactive Sexual Fantasy Videodisc*, 1984 – 1989.
Video still.

The work consists of a screen depicting the image of a woman *Marion*, and a touchpad in front of the screen. Spectators are encouraged to stand at the touchpad and interact with *Marion*. *Marion* demands that viewers interact with her by touching different parts of her body via a touch sensitive pad, she does this by repetitively knocking on the screen and as you walk past the work in the gallery you can hear her calling you forward. Each different body part offers a choice of options and narratives that the viewer must decide on how to play out. By reaching through the screen and attempting to simulate touching the viewer and by asking the viewer to touch her, Marion is trying to connect with the physical world. In an interview Hershman Leeson states:

I see that where we are in culture and in society and maybe in evolution is that we are physical beings and we're reaching through screens to kinda (sic) take out the information that's inside a virtual space and bring it back towards our physicality (Hershman Leeson, 2013).

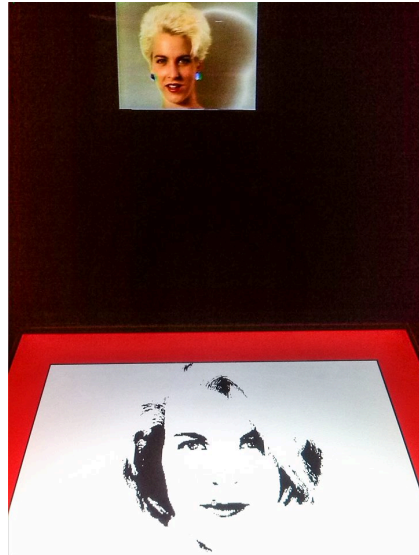


Figure 14. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact, The First Interactive Sexual Fantasy Videodisc*, 1984 – 1989.

Installation view at ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe



Figure 15. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact, The First Interactive Sexual Fantasy Videodisc*, 1984 – 1989.

Installation view at ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

By touching *Marion's* head you have options such as: learn about reproductive technologies or, how a woman sees herself. By touching her middle you have options to begin a fictive narrative with a choice of three characters or have your own image replace the one on screen. Hershman Leeson is testing her audience, as well as expanding how we interact with screens and new technology. This work creates an environment of surveillance, you are watching and being

watched simultaneously, therefore your choices may be influenced by the how the work positions you and the environment of the gallery. Indulging in a kind of digital foreplay with a woman on screen is a direct reflection back onto the viewer and instantly asks you to make moral choices. If I choose her legs does that say more about me than if I choose her head? Would I have chosen that path to take had I been on my own in the room? The placement of these works in the public space of the gallery heightens the viewers experience and creates a cyclical, voyeuristic experience where we become characters within the work as well as viewers of the work. In a way we watch ourselves being watched- as opposed to viewing them on a personal computer via the Internet, which is one of the predicaments explored in the works based on social networks. Abigail Solomon-Godeau (2005, p.129) describes Hershman Leeson's work as Lacanian in its "captivation through an image"...the ruse and the lure by which she catches out the spectator, who thereupon discovers himself or herself to be "complicitous in the complimentary apparatuses of surveillance and spectacle". Solomon-Godeau discusses the works through their surveilling and watchful traits. The technology and installation methods used reinforce a feeling that citizens living within the culture of viewing technology and CCTV experience.

Deep Contact is a progression from *Lorna* in that the speed and direction of the story can change, and the user is (literally) much more in touch with the interface. The character *Marion* is also a transition for Hershman Leeson as the nature of her subjectivity is the seductress or temptress. *Marion* is dressed in leather and her voice and movements echo a type of pornographic performance where the woman is luring the spectator. However different from pornography where typically the woman seduces the man into bed, *Marion* although depicting this 'type' of woman has a head full of informational data on reproductive systems and her other body parts have numerous 'types' of characters in them. *Marion* doesn't perform a pornographic scene; she does not perform the 'type' of seductive scene her actions and gestures may suggest. Her multiple identity made up of a demon and a Zen master propose that there is more to *Marion* than her performance would suggest. Hershman Leeson uses the image of the seductress to play with notions of multiple subjectivities and also how women are read by how

they dress or talk. Just because *Marion* gives off the impression of seducing the viewer does not mean that is her intention. Feona Attwood discusses practices of alternative porn as examples of agency performed by women online who although fit into the pornographic realm, do not subscribe to typical notions of what a woman's body should look like (through the display of body hair) or behave (seen in the display of menstruation). These alternatives for Attwood display agency through their performativity described by Judith Butler as the repetition of various norms where agency occurs through the possibility of a variation within these repetitious acts (Attwood, 2011, p.211). In this way *Marion's* agency comes through her denial of sexual pleasure and use of educational videos.

Although the technology seems dated now, both *Lorna* and *Deep Contact* present alternative ways and reflexive ways of viewing the subject woman on screen. The characters take part in a form of subversive repetition through playing the 'becoming the subject woman'. *Lorna's* existence is constructed around her experience of television. Her fragmented subjectivity seems to be doomed as her fate is laid out and at the hands of the viewer. However, glitches in the system can limit the interaction of the viewer who may never reach the end of the disc and their perceived control may never be fully achieved, and in fact can never be fulfilled due to the limited number of programmed endings on the disc. Similarly *Marion's* role as seductress lures the viewer in to explore her body only to be given a biology lesson or be taken on a path with a Zen master. Glitches may be unintentional but I believe that they are important to exploring the conditions of viewing interactive and computer and Internet based works. It is in these temporal and visual glitches and the shifting positions of control that interrupt typical narratives of the woman on screen. And in the positioning of the spectator within the work they become more embodied and aware of their corporeal position as a spectator and active participant.

Attempting to Interrupt the Informatics of Domination in Cyberfeminist Theory and Practice in the 1990s

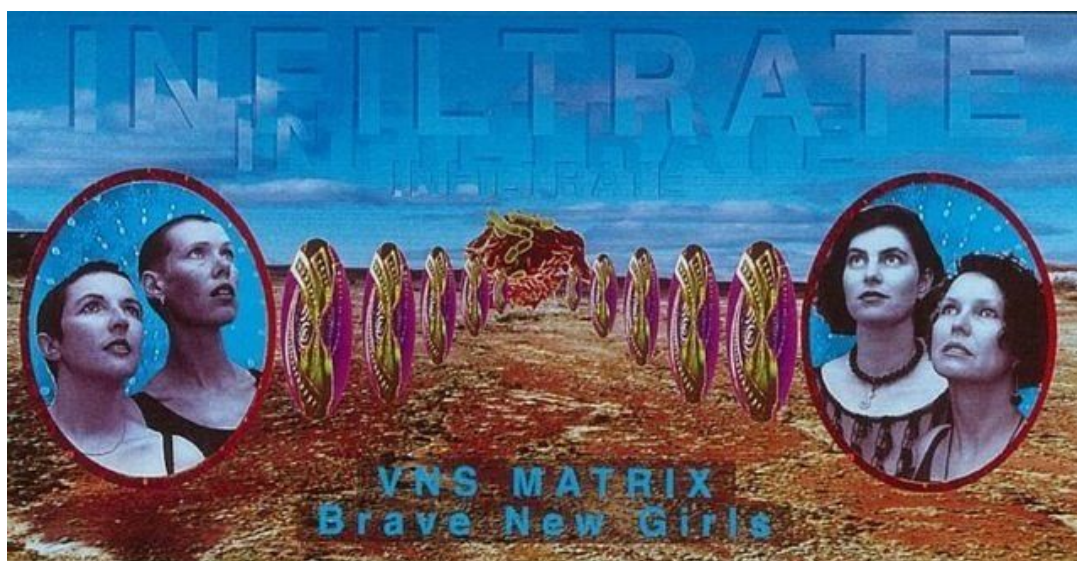


Figure 16. VNS Matrix, Postcard, 1994.

In this section I look at feminist politics of the 1990s built upon frustrations with male dominated technological and digital media worlds. Not only was the representation of women on screen an issue but also, women working in tech and gaining access to the industry proved difficult. This section looks at cyberfeminist politics and interventions in the nineties in terms of the artworks created and also the debates around the feminist politics being addressed. These debates are useful to arguments later in the thesis in terms of who is being represented and the politics around feminist art interventions.

In a nod to Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, VNS Matrix an Australian group of feminist artists, coders, and web designers, produced the *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* in 1991. In their manifesto VNS Matrix describe themselves as: "the modern cunt...we believe in jouissance madness holiness and poetry...saboteurs of big daddy mainframe the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix" (VNS Matrix). Transcending the scary new networks, VNS Matrix declared a utopian Internet for women by inserting themselves into the network. Their practice draws on Luce Irigaray's theories of mimesis as a strategic way for woman to reclaim the body as "speaking subject" (Irigaray, 1977, p.220).

This reclaiming of the network as a space for women is most blatantly seen in the writings of Sadie Plant in her 1995 book *Zeros and Ones*. Using a fluid method of writing Plant's thesis on performing women's difference in cyberspace bears resemblance to Irigaray's theories of strategic mimesis. Plant suggests that: "woman, like the computer and cybernetic system, is a simulation mechanism, performing and imitating the self in a political gesture that usurps the categorical construction of woman as nature" (Plant 1995: 58–9).



Figure 17. VNS Matrix, *Undaddy Mainframe* (2014), *Direct Line* (2015) and VNS Matrix's *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* (1991)
Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, 2017

VNS Matrix's cyber-activist works aimed to insert women into the realm of the virtual, a place that was male dominated. Their manifesto was a starting point declaring their fight against the 'Big Daddy Mainframe'. They used irony and re-appropriation of language as "linguistic weapons of mass instruction" (Barrett, 2015). They posted the manifesto on billboards, created zines and fly posted. They also created interactive works such as the 1994 *corpusfantasticaMOO* a MOO (Multi Object Oriented) described as "a colonized body, where entities meet without numbers" (Couey in Malloy, 2003, P.76) it was a body without gender, class or race, a non-specific body in cyberspace, where assumptions of subjectivities and identities should not be assumed.

In the installation *All New Gen* the artists created a computer game where the character *All New Gen*'s mission was to sabotage the data banks of *Big Daddy Mainframe*. In her mission *All New Gen* is accompanied by the *DNA sluts: Patina de Panties, Dentata and the Princess of Slime*, described as a band of "sexy and subversive renegades" (du Preez, 2009, p.141). Corneilia Solifrank states that even though VNS Matrix and Plant's feminist strategies "provided an alternative to traditional ideologies...and had an empowering effect; their essentialist tendencies limited its artistic and political potential" (Solifrank, 2015). In a talk Disruption Lab in 2015, Virginia Barratt and Francesca Da Rimni of VNS Matrix describe their work as "radical cyberfeminism" and that liberal cyberfeminism was critical of their essentialist work. They state this discomfort was due to their "radical performativity mobilized by a bunch of white girls from Down Under, living on stolen land, the terra nullis, the land of no one, that the colonial fathers had plundered from the sovereign peoples in 1788" (Barratt & DaRimni, 2015). VNS Matrix describe this work as radical cyberfeminism. They were not so concerned about their essentialist tendencies, more the fact that this work was a radical statement, causing a reaction, describing it as a "hit and run"(ibid).



Figure 18. VNS Matrix, *All New Gen*, 1994, kiosk installation, YYZ Gallery.

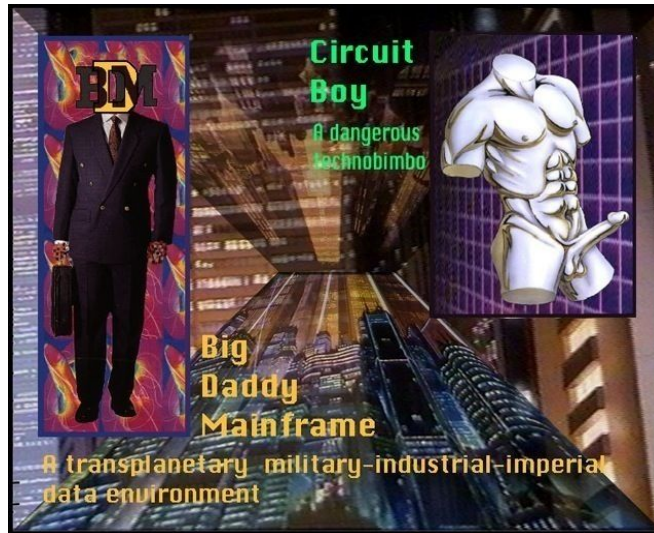


Figure 19. VNS Matrix, *All New Gen*, 1992, Interface Still.

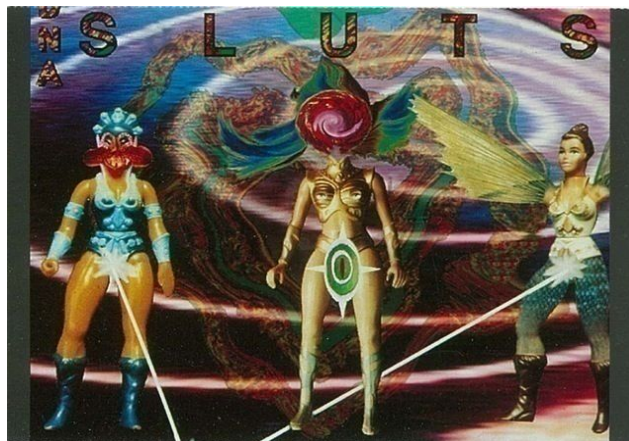


Figure 20. VNS Matrix, *All New Gen*, 1992, Interface still.



Figure 21. VNS Matrix, *All New Gen*, 1992, Interface still.

Early cyberfeminist practices and theories were revolts against misogynist attitudes that claimed technology and the Internet as male spheres, or a boys club, however many feminist theorists working within and around cyberfeminism were careful not to define it as a movement or indeed to define it at all. This reluctance or even disagreement in the defining of cyberfeminism is illustrated in the 1997 *Old Boys Network (OBN)-100 Anti-Theses* (produced as part of the first Cyberfeminist International that took place in Kassel, Germany, September 20-28, 1997). It is a manifesto of 100 things cyberfeminism is not, such as: "cyberfeminism is not ideology, cyberfeminism is not praxis, cyberfeminism is not a structure, cyberfeminism is not a picnic." Sollifrank describes the OBN as based on the "Cyberfeminist strategy of irritation and elusiveness" (ibid).

Questioning the lack of definition and acknowledgment of historical feminist political agenda within the Cyberfeminist Conference at Kassel, Faith Wilding asked: "Where is the feminism in Cyberfeminism?" She states that Cyberfeminists must clearly formulate political goals and positions (Wilding, 1997). With reference to Sadie Plant's emphasis on Ada Lovelace's contribution to the invention of computer technology in her book *Zeros and Ones* (1995), Wilding states:

Sadly, the lesson of Ada Lovelace is that even though women have made major contributions to the invention of computers and computer programming, this hasn't changed the perception, or reality, of women's condition in the new technologies (Wilding, 1997).

Plant's writing has also been accused of essentialising gender and neglecting to consider 'race'. Jessie Daniels states:

Plant's writing is characteristic of the field, as there is relatively little discussion of the intersections of gender with 'race,' except in cases where 'race' is included in a long list of additional variables to be added on to 'gender'. Thus, when cyberfeminists explicitly engage

both gender and race it is both conspicuous and instructive (Daniels, 2009, p.104).

Indeed the nature of the cyberfeminist's work such as VNS Matrix in creating a cyborg in relation to Haraway's cyborg could be seen as contradictory, where Haraway "discusses her cyborg figure centrally in terms of racial hierarchies and the politics of partiality" (Fernandez in Paasonen 2005, p.203), these cyberfeminist groups seem to position their cyborg as 'all women' not recognizing the different subject positions held by women. An example of this is neglecting to differentiate between "privileged white 'cyborgian' women with web camera sites and self-declared nudist tendencies, or the 'cyborg' women of color working at *maquiladoras* manufacturing computers and web cameras that such acts require (cf. Wright 2000; Fusco 1998)" (Paasonen 2005, p.203). Susanna Paasonen states:

The cyborg, outlined as a figure for discussing differences among and between women, may work to render invisible differences in women's locations and the varying ways in which technology enables and conditions them" (Paasonen 2005, p.203).

Maria Fernandez mentions this rendering of invisible differences as experienced through personal communications with several cyberfeminist colleagues at the Cyberfeminist Conference discussed by Wilding above. Fernandez believes that it would be impossible to erase difference, however the notion of difference could possibly be "read as something other than alienating or threatening qualities" (Fernandez, 2002, p.31). Critical of the "whitewashing" of feminist politics within cyberfeminism Fernandez and Wilding's 2002 edited anthology *Domain Errors: Cyberfeminist Practices* was an attempt to open up cyberfeminist debates and agendas, in what they called the "new cyberfeminism" aiming to "scrutinize, publicize, and contest the complex effects of technology on many aspects of women's lives; and to fashion a politics of presence and embodiment that insists on full engagement with the discourses of technology and power" (Fernandez, 2002, p.27).

Criticism for cyberfeminist practices not only came in the form of its neglecting of the history of feminism as important to this new form of activism and provocation but also in its use of the term cyborg and the neglecting to recognise difference within that term. This criticism of cyberfeminism is reminiscent of the revolt against second wave feminist politics by working class women, women of colour and lesbian women who were excluded from debates on women's rights in the 1970s. The cyborg at the centre of Haraway's essay draws from Chela Sandoval's work on "oppositional consciousness, a political identity 'born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class' (Paasonen, 2005, p.204). This and the breaking down of dualities associated with gendered identities were central to Haraway's thesis, and according to Paasonen are lost in cyberfeminist agendas. Cyberfeminism refused to have a single definition and this is possibly an easy way out of addressing or taking responsibility for such issues as racialisation and gendered identities. Nakamura (2008, p.20) states that in Haraway's cyborg manifesto "the woman of color in the integrated circuit of information technology production is framed as an object rather than a subject of interactivity", recognising difference with how women use technology rather than speaking for 'all women' is vital to the study of women Internet users. In *Domain Errors* 2002, Maria Fernandez discusses racism with the cyberfeminist movement, using the term 'race' not as a validating category or any kind of fact but as a way to discuss difference, as she states "perceptions of 'difference' are still largely based on epidermal schemas (Fernandez, 2002, p.31). Fernandez describes how through personal engagements at the Cyberfeminist Conference in Rotterdam in 1999 she discovered some of the 'cyberfeminists' explained how it was useless to talk about differences because they could never be resolved (ibid). Fernandez also discusses the ironic cyborg as a troublesome fiction in that Haraway discusses the woman of colour as the quintessential cyborg however fails to mention that this relationship between human and machine is one of necessity and the conditions under which these women work are exploitative and physically damaging (Fernandez, 2002, p.32).

Cyberfeminism, the movement, theory, idea, notion, was the start of a feminist interrogation on the (in)visibility of women as “speaking subjects” online and in digital technology industry, the roles created for women do not represent the subjects who occupy the label ‘women’. Although there are many conflicting and variable ways of defining or explaining cyberfeminism, the basis of this feminist work was to use the networks of domination to speak for the ‘other’, the constructed ‘other’. Its aim was to dissolve old binaries and offer new ways of thinking through the representation of gender and ‘race’ in an online, digital capacity. Paasonen (2005, p.205) also states that by rejecting or collapsing the agenda and theories of the cyberfeminist position due to their misrecognition of previous feminist theories and agenda, feminist writers are contributing to a similar simplification they accuse cyberfeminists of. Whether the work of early cyberfeminists disregarded previous waves of feminism and theories of difference that go beyond gender, they were speaking and acting against the invisibility and miss-representation of women in digital cultures, their agenda was feminist.³⁴ Corneilia Sollfrank one of the “instigators” of cyberfeminism describes how the movement used the word feminism not as a set of politics or even as a means to be political it was used to “cause irritation and curiosity” and in this way attract attention as a method of “opening up spaces for thinking and acting” (Sollfrank, 2015). Not with one strategy or political aim, cyberfeminists wanted to provoke and through this provocation their aim was to draw attention to the issues surrounding women who work with and within technology.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to give a background into early interactive new media artworks that dealt with the construction of female subjectivity in technology and how artists work to challenge these constructions. I used cyberfeminist theory as an example of how theory works alongside the creation of artworks attempting to challenge representation within a new medium. The basis of this chapter was to

³⁴ Discussing the book *Cyberfeminism* by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, Paasonen states that the authors’ argument for going beyond discussion of historical knowledge and conceptual perspective such as collapsing the writings of Firestone and Plant do a disservice to feminist agendas and actually “contribute to a similar simplification that they accuse other authors of.” (Paasonen, 2005, p.205)

introduce a method of theory and practice that both challenged norms of female representation in new media technology and the Internet and to highlight debates within these subjects. The study of these early practices lay the framework for the debates and investigations of contemporary theories and practices throughout the rest of the thesis.

This chapter has shown that think of the cyborg or posthuman subject not as something that exists separate to the body, as in some cyberfeminist theory, but as in relation to technology and intersubjective is a more useful strategy within feminist theory. Wilding argued as to where the feminism was in early cyberfeminist prophesies, remarking on new 'cyberfeminisms' or a second wave of cyberfeminism that in her opinion was more connected to their history of feminist strategies. Second wave feminist artists employed activist strategies and tactics synthesized from avant-garde movements, feminist theory and practices of everyday life (Wilding, 2001). Technology, the body and subjectivity are intertwined, representation on screens or interfaces are not separate from our 'real lives' they are part of it, and within this theory questions must be asked as to how female subjectivity is constituted within this and through the body. Braidotti claims, "our era has turned visualization into the ultimate form of control" where the "triumph of vision over all other senses reinstates a hierarchy of bodily perception which over-privileges vision in relation to other senses, especially touch and sound"(Braidotti, 2006a, p.204). The very basis of this research is to look at how technology is used in everyday life as a practice of constructing female subjectivity based on hetero-normative and postfeminist visions of femininity compared with the strategies within feminist art practices that challenge these socially constructed norms.

Lynn Hershman Leeson's interactive works challenged early users of computer technology and dominant narratives of 'Woman' on screen. In some ways the subjects Hershman Leeson produced present stereotypical notions of female subjectivity and in this way do not challenge gendered, racialised or classed binaries but rather display them as form of reflection. *Lorna* is limited in the outcomes of her destiny and her housebound circumstances place the woman in the feminine domestic space of the home. In *Deep Contact* Marion calls for

attention, she aims to seduce the passerby by knocking on the screen and inviting the spectator to touch her. In both works we see the importance of spectator interaction. The works play with irony in how they place the female subject, either housebound or as the seductress, and the reality of the interactive elements of the programs. Subversion in these works lies in their ability within the story telling to eschew expectations spectators may have of the female subjects and also in the unintentional glitches of the software.

These inconsistencies within the female subject and the nature of technology to interrupt are repeated throughout this thesis as I deal with notions of interactivity and the performance of certain tropes of female subjectivity on social networks. I used this strategy of glitching and fragmenting in my practice. In the work *Have it All* I fragmented a selfie video into hundreds of still frames and uploaded them to Tumblr where the app created a slideshow that was only viewable as a moving image if the spectator tapped or scrolled the computer fast. This chapter discussed the theories of Margaret Morse who describes fragmented interactivity as creating a space for reflection. Michele White's notion that these glitches may incur masochistic pleasure compromise how the works are intended to be experienced. In this way, attempting to create subversive imagery that denies pleasure or highlights the activity of looking by forcing the spectator to be active does not always have the desired effect. I also faced limits when using apps or pre-programmed social media spaces, which exemplifies Lev Manovich's theories on the myths of interactivity.

The practices of cyberfeminist groups such as OBN and VNS Matrix was to create works laden with irony, and to reflect the tech world of coders and digital artists by explicitly inserting overt 'female' images such as the cunt as an expression intended to draw attention and disgust. This unruly femininity goes beyond the acceptable bodies that constitute femininity, and by choosing to show the cunt they are the 'sluts' they claim to be. Paasonen (2010, p.74) states that irony can be misunderstood and taken literally if ironic distance is erased, it is important that these claims are not misread and that the irony of the situation is explicit. This re-appropriating of terms such as 'slut' and 'cunt' draw on Butler's theories on parodic re-appropriation as a strategy to "redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex

and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity" (Butler, 1990, p.156). However this 'cunt art' and the cyberfeminist rejection of second wave feminist ideology infers a hypocritical stance on the cyberfeminist's part as this work is similar to that made by feminist artists of the 1970s³⁵.

For Haraway the cyborg was an ironic take on the potential for identities to become fluid and for binaries to be erased, the irony of social media is that racial and gendered subjectivities are more visible in these environments and more prone to mass definitions and assumptions. Identity tourism and performing cyber-subjectivities can help to explore personal identity traits that may not be acceptable in society, such as performing drag, however one must be careful that through this performance they are not simply repeating stereotypes of gender rather than challenging them. As Judith Butler states in *Bodies that Matter*, performing drag is not always subversive as seen in how it is portrayed through "homosexual panic" in Hollywood films such as 'Tootsie' or 'Some Like it Hot' (Butler, 1993, p.126). Taking Haraway's ironic cyborg and Braidotti's theories of the virtual feminine, politics of parody and 'as if' to examine these simulations of 'types' of female subjectivity propose new possibilities and ways of seeing. These works can be effective in exposing the constructed image of 'Woman' online where ironic distance is exercised. Methods of interactivity and embodied spectatorship heighten the experience of looking where the spectator's body is complicit in experiencing of such artworks. These are methods I applied to my practice in a number of different ways; playing around with positioning the spectator and making them feel complicit in the work. In Appendix A I have detailed how the gallery exhibitions *Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity & On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl* created environments where the spectator is placed in-between screen & performance where the reality of the image changes as the spectator moves around the space and accesses different screens.

³⁵ 'Cunt art' refers to second wave works such as Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* or, Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S.*, where comparisons can be drawn with cyberfeminist works where the cunt is explicit. By denying second wave influence cyberfeminist artists deny a history of feminist art.

Moving forward I discuss how these methods are used in more contemporary practices and the complications around social media-based art practices and gallery installations where female artists are attempting to challenge binaries of the virgin/whore and stereotypes of white femininity and sexuality whilst in many ways submitting to them online.

CHAPTER TWO

Shaping the Body Online

This chapter centres on performing the female body online. I begin by looking at examples of early social media in text-based chat rooms known as MOOs (Multi Object Oriented) or MUDs (Multi User Domain). Internet theorist and academics at the time heralded these spaces for facilitating identity play where users could escape being marked or coded by their physical bodies. Although these spaces seemed to offer a form of identity play where the user is disembodied from their corporeality I explore how individuality and autonomy is only implied in these networks and how homogenous stereotypes of 'race' and gender prevail. The focus in this chapter is on female bodies where feminine beauty and femininity is defined as able-bodied, white, thin and hairless.

I look at early 'digital everyday' performances of female subjectivity online through Jennicam, the first example of a web cam performer. I use the term 'digital everyday performance' to describe Jennicam, where the project of documenting and uploading images from nine webcams placed throughout her apartment every five minutes twenty four hours a day suggests a type of performing of everyday life. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, p.88) note that, "people, objects, events, *perform* for the diffused audience through their involvement in a richly symbolic world of spectacle." In this sense, Ringley's presentation of the everyday through the constant circulation of images makes her project a form of digital everyday performance. Jimroglou (1999) considers Jennicam to be an exploration of cyborg subjectivity, drawing on notions of subjectivity as fragmented and Haraway's cyborg subject as one that is neither animal nor machine but a hybrid.

The interest in these case studies is to demonstrate how opportunities for 'all women' to perform their individual subjectivity online opens up spaces to escape embodiment or embody a cyborg state. Whilst these opportunities imply

that individuals are no longer tied to stereotypical renderings of their physical identities many online spaces also work to regulate what bodies are made visible, thus re-enforcing the norms they pertain to disregard³⁶. Sharing space on online forums and social media sites with advertising influences notions of what a 'normal' female body should look like. In this way social media spaces imply perceptions of agency and control however the structures for performing ones subjectivity tend to relate back to traditional cultural norms where femininity is aligned with whiteness and heterosexuality. In relation to the cyborg, many practices of online performance by women have been regarded as cyborg. These definitions are made in relation to the embodied relationships women have with technology, thus embodying a cyborg state. However, the cyborg is a construction that denies definition and ruptures flows of information. Digital everyday performances by women do not all display cyborg sensibilities and also are not consciously attempting to challenge dominant narratives of gender norms. Putting Haraway's cyborg theory into practice is not always appropriate to women performing online. In this chapter I use examples of digital everyday performances and consider their potential to exemplify Haraway's cyborg whilst also highlighting the difficulties in applying these theories to practice.

Common Knowledge and 'Appropriateness'

Susanna Paasonen describes the objects of common knowledge' as "tools of knowing and categorising 'us' and 'them', and policing differences in everyday encounters" (Paasonen, 2005, p.7). She looks at these objects as "operations of power", much in the way Judith Butler discusses "prevailing epistemes of culture" as methods of controlling gender binaries where spaces on the Internet work to enforce these common knowledge epistemes (ibid). The objects of common knowledge relate to stereotypical ideas of gender, such as women represented online through pink websites, soft, heterosexual and biologically female (where

³⁶ For instance in blogs for women dealing with cancer in many ways enable them to escape embodiment and share stories, however they also get hijacked by the beauty industry encouraging women to engage in beauty rituals as a form of self-care.

assumptions around reproductive capabilities are a given). The notion of common knowledge relates closely to gender performativity which Judith Butler describes as: “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler, 1999, preface, p.xv). Common knowledge is aligned with notions of ‘natural’, ‘real’ or ‘normal’ in terms of gender and any action or type of gender performance that occurs outside of that could be considered a subversive act. Subversive acts are how Butler states individuals can rupture these gender norms.

The ‘normal’ bodies presented in this chapter display how “mainstream stereotypes” (Bailey et al., 2013, p.92) are categorised by marketing analytics that reproduce real-world patterns of discrimination and are encouraged by online architecture as: “highly stereotypical white, heteronormative sexualized performances of girl and “feminine” beauty, combined with social norms to open youth up to discrimination and harassment (e.g., slut shaming, homophobia)” (ibid., p.437). In my research and my practice I am exploring the performance of the white heteronormative female figure. This figure is a starting point, where I examine how it is enforced as a norm and how it is worked on and challenged by female artists who are closely aligned to this figure. This is seen explicitly in my creation of the online alter ego SweetHeart, described in detail in appendix one.

In her book *Explicit Body in Performance Art* (1997), Rebecca Schneider discusses the term ‘appropriate’ in its double meaning, in reference to explicit bodies as in who gets to *appropriate* and what is *appropriate* for certain bodies. The rules around who has the right to appropriate certain bodies and who has the right to transgress what is understood as appropriate underlie much of the debate within this thesis. When looking at performances by women online there are times when certain performances that are appropriated are more accepted than when similar performances transgress the boundaries of their assumed appropriateness. This also refers back to a Judith Butler 1998 text *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* where she discusses the sight of the transvestite on stage as one that compels pleasure and applause whereas the sight of the same transvestite on a bus can compel fear, rage and even violence (Butler, 1988, p.527). The proximity of the performer and the context of the performance alter the appropriateness of

this act. As this thesis goes on it is clear that there are certain performances of femaleness and femininity that are deemed appropriate and acceptable depending on the website or social network used and also on the intention of the work. For artists it can sometimes be more acceptable to appropriate and transgress gender norms than to see a 'normal' woman transgress her appropriateness. However, the networks themselves complicate the boundaries of acceptability and appropriateness. Just as the stage is a safer and more appropriate stage for the transvestite to be on, the stages of social network platforms and the uses of imaging technology in these platforms complicate the notions of acceptability. This is something I discovered in my practice through performing as SweetHeart.

This chapter explores how 'appropriate' female gender performance is encouraged on social networks and how bodies that are deemed inappropriate are encouraged to fix themselves through beauty practices or are excluded from the spaces altogether. It also looks at notions of explicitness and how certain performances of female gender are presumed sexual or implicated in a sexual way due to the visibility of the female body. In this way we see how the body marked female is always fighting against these assumptions.

The Limits of Escaping the Body Online

It is important to look at early literature on how text interaction online and computer interfaces controlled how users defined their identities and the choices provided on these spaces to users in displaying their physical identities. Internet researcher Sue Thomas stated that in LambdaMOO³⁷ your anonymity was "closely protected", Thomas follows this statement with: "...but today in somewhere like Facebook if you're not you it doesn't really work" (Thomas, 2011). This focus on authenticity online is highlighted in the language and forms of address used on social networks such as YouTube's: "Broadcast Yourself", Facebook and others focus on the individual as a sharer and receiver of information, someone who

³⁷ LambdaMOO, which was a text-based social space -a multi-user object-oriented setting where characters who login and connect on the space have no physical or visual bodily presence and communicate purely through text. In LambdaMOO, worlds and spaces are built by users, they occupy these spaces they build and navigate their way around them using sets of commands such as @dig, @build, @examine.

shares their world with the wider world. But whose world is shared? Through the structures created on the digital platforms and interfaces we use and the trends in what we share, are these so called expressions of individuality less subjective than the user is lead to believe?

```

Telnet - lennon.cc.gatech.edu
Connect Edit Terminal Help
lennon 4>telnet lambda.moo.mud.org 8888
Trying 209.1.106.178 ...
Connected to lambda.moo.mud.org.
Escape character is '^]'.

*****
* Welcome to LambdaMOO! *
*****

Running Version 1.8.0r5b of LambdaMOO

PLEASE NOTE:
  LambdaMOO is a new kind of society, where thousands of people voluntarily
  come together from all over the world. What these people say or do may not
  always be to your liking; as when visiting any international city, it is wise
  to be careful who you associate with and what you say.
  The operators of LambdaMOO have provided the materials for the buildings of
  this community, but are not responsible for what is said or done in them. In
  particular, you must assume responsibility if you permit minors or others to
  access LambdaMOO through your facilities. The statements and viewpoints
  expressed here are not necessarily those of the wizards, Pavel Curtis,
  Stanford University, or Placeware Inc., and those parties disclaim any
  responsibility for them.

NOTICE FOR JOURNALISTS AND RESEARCHERS:
  The citizens of LambdaMOO request that you ask for permission from all
  direct participants before quoting any material collected here.

For assistance either now or later, type 'help'.
The lag is approximately 3 seconds; there are 199 connected.

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Figure 22. Screen grab of LambdaMOO homepage



Figure 23. YouTube logo

Sherry Turkle believed forms of identity ‘passing’ on text-based MOOs were a product of a postmodern society; schizophrenic identity play is, according to Turkle bringing “postmodern theory down to earth” (Turkle, 1995, p.18). Through the playing out of different selves the user is no longer tied to physical

interpretations of the image, they can travel in cyberspace exploring their many selves, and through this is the potential for personal transformation within the 'real life' self. This form of exploring the self as multiple comes from a psychoanalytic reading of the subject and the self through Lacan³⁸ as a "postmodern attempt to portray the self as a realm of discourse rather than as a real thing or a permanent structure in the mind"(Turkle, 1995, p.178)³⁹. Michael Ian Borer claims that Turkle's appropriation of Lacan is insufficient, claiming that there is nothing 'post' about recent technological changes, that postmodernism is only a symptom not a solution.

Postmodernism is probably best understood as a social movement in itself, rather than as a useful social theory for understanding the salient aspects of contemporary social life and, in turn, the cyborgian condition (i.e. the interaction of technology and humanity) (Borer, 2002, p.3).

Turkle's 1995 work in her book *Life on Screen*, although important research in itself came with criticism due to its celebration of online identity tourism. Even though these online spaces provided the ability to act anonymously as a different person, the identities one could 'try on' were still very much linked with traditional gendered and racialised stereotypes. Lisa Nakamura states in her 2002 book *Cybertypes* that the choices of identity available are often directly taken from popular media sources like films, video games and novels (Nakamura, 2002, p.61). Nakamura explains through her analysis of "identity tourism" online or "passing" that even the role-playing tactics of early Internet users "reveal a great deal about their cultural and ideological investments and their assumptions about both the other and themselves" (Nakamura, 2002, pp.59-60). Through early uses of avatars and digitally produced graphics for role-play, users revealed via the playing out of un-native identities they were re-enforcing cultural stereotypes of 'race' and gender.

³⁸ Turkle states that in Lacan "the complex chains of associations that constitute meaning for each individual lead to no final endpoint or core self" (Turkle, 1995, p.178).

Far from becoming sensitized to what it feels like to be another race in cyberspace, many users masquerading as racial minorities in chat spaces tend to depict themselves in ways that simply repeat and re-enact old racial stereotypes (Nakamura, 2002, p.107).

The concepts of 'race' and gender work to keep people in subordinate categories and reinforce racism and sexism and although Nakamura agrees with much feminist theory that it is necessary to occupy these positions she quotes Gayatri Spivak who states: "essentialism is a trap"(Nakamura, 2002, p.7). Nakamura also asks "How do we begin to understand the place of authenticity, in the landscape of new media?" (Nakamura, 2002, p.15)

Drop down menus and lists are provided online for users to select identity markers, which in Teresa deLauretis' terms "stick to us like a wet silk dress" (deLauretis, 1989, p.12). Only being able to pick one form of identity at a time, such as "Asian-American, Gay and Lesbian, or Latino"..." forces the user to choose 'what' they are"(Nakamura, 2002, p.54). Nakamura states that in the structure of some online menus users can only pick one racial identity and this "closes off the possibility of alternate or hybrid definitions of racial identity" (Nakamura, 2002, p.104). In her 2006 book *The Body and the Screen-Theories of Internet Spectatorship* Michele White explains how Yahoo! "enforces desire along with binary gender", Yahoo! coaxes the female identified spectator to "find a match" saying- "go on, he's waiting" (White, 2006, p.28). This assumed heterosexuality along with the colour coding of children's toys on toy store websites White states: "encourages girls to occupy a different setting and subject position from boys and render binary gender as a necessary component of mediated settings" (White, 2006, p.28).

Lev Manovich describes how "new media objects" are trying to "compensate for their earlier role in making us all the same" by today "working to convince us that we are all unique"(Manovich, 2001, p.61). Manovich describes the desire to externalise the mind as a way of standardising subjects in modern mass society and with the objectification of the internal, mental processes "the private and individual is translated into the public and becomes regulated" (ibid., p.74).

Mark Andrejevic (2004) describes how Bill Gates' attempt to sell digital customisation to the masses was by design a system that creates an environment where the viewer is the star of the show, everywhere they look they will see themselves. "The *i* that designates "interactivity" overlaps with the *I* of identity thinking" (Andrejevic, 2004, p.41).

In this way the user's underlying desires that they share online are turned into data and are returned to them in the form of a 'desired' product. Rather than giving the user what they ask for, new media objects suggest what the user would like to choose based on the previous clicks they have made. We see this in online advertising where the user encounters many ads that are algorithmically generated based on data produced by previous searches or the pages they are on. This alignment of consumer desire with individual self-representation is influential to how social media users design their home pages or represent their cyber-agency⁴⁰. Rosalind Gill describes this form of perceived online agency through a postfeminist analysis on the perception of individual choice offered to women. Postfeminist sensibilities and agency online will be discussed further in chapter three.

Manovich described the online systems of choice as a "myth of interactivity"(Manovich, 2001, p.70) and Nakamura describes how scholars and critics wrote about interactivity as if it were "the drug of choice for cultural elites or 'networked subjects'"(Nakamura, 2008, p.14). "'Choice,' 'presence,' 'movement,' 'possibility' are all terms which could describe the experiential modalities of websurfing," as Tara McPherson writes, and during the web's relatively short commercial history, they have been integral to the rhetoric of the new networked economy that sells "choice and possibility" as a side effect of digital/analog media convergence (ibid.).

Just as limited and stereotyped options in MUDs and MOOs existed for gendered and racial identity, new media works in a similar way. Although users are made to think they have individual choice over what they look at or buy online,

⁴⁰ For example in her research into teenage girls Bebo homepages, Ringrose (2010) illustrates how girls use symbols such as the Playboy Bunny on their pages. The symbol of the playboy bunny is used to signify the self as sexy and sexual online, "because there is a visual imperative to display a sexy self on the social networking sites of many of the girls, the moment of seeing and being seen as 'sexy' is absolutely 'central' (Thomas 2004) to how desirable sexual subjectivities are formed within the visual culture of our teen girls' Bebo sites"(p.179).

there is never unlimited choice. "New media appeals to us so powerfully partly because it satisfies our needs in post-industrial society to 'construct [our] own custom lifestyle from a large (but not infinite) number of choices' "(Nakamura, 2008, p.1674).

Bodies that Matter: Cyber-subjects and Embodiment Online

That is, however direct it may seem, our experience is not only always mediated by the lived bodies that we are, but our lived bodies (and our experience of them) is always also mediated and qualified by our engagements with other bodies and things. Thus, our experiences are mediated and qualified not only through the various transformative technologies of perception and expression but also by historical and cultural systems that constrain both the inner limits of our perception and the outer limits of our world (Sobchak, 2004, p.4).

In general, personal home pages are more about representing one's embodied and social locations than fantasies of transgressing them. Embodiment, as identifiable through photographic and textual depictions becomes a cornerstone of self-representation (Paasonen, 2005, p.111).

Paasonen (2005) criticises assumptions that home pages enable a type of performativity that is falsely understood as identity exploration and production or a conscious act. Paasonen's criticism is that to talk about performativity in the "Butlerian" sense is to describe the construction of gendered identity as already determined and reproduced through repetitive acts that are unconsciously acted

out. Therefore it is wrong to state that the production of a home page enables new forms of identity without looking at “representational norms and conventions, or the consumerist ties and underpinnings”(Paasonen, 2005, p.111). Here I will look at websites and social networks that aim to affect women’s bodies positively through their empowering words and actions, however they are also tied to and underpinned by consumerist desire and the notion that all women are the same.

Borrowing the term from Victoria Pitts’ 2004 paper *Illness and Internet empowerment: writing and reading breast cancer in cyberspace*, ‘cyber-agency’ could be analysed through cyberfeminist theories on the freedoms of identity online. Pitts’ research focuses on women with breast cancer and how they use social spaces online to discuss and document (visually and textually), their illnesses and to share these with other sufferers. Pitts labels the subjects of this agency ‘cyber subjects’. “Released from traditional bodily constraints, or ‘situationally freed from the empirical shell of the body’, cyber subjects are left to represent themselves virtually (2000: 378). Thus, choice in what our identity is and how others will identify us is part of the promise of the on-line world (Willson, 2000)” (Pitts, 2004, p.34). Pitts thus sees these subjects as cyborgian in their embodiment of the interface and the possibilities of escaping the body or experiencing the body in another form.

However positive the future seemed in terms of online identities the spaces provided online for blogging and sharing information are also shared spaces with advertising and consumerist ideology. For Pitts and others this poses a problem to the predicted fluid nature and the agency of identity online. Pitts discusses the corporate appropriation of breast cancer survivors through a gendered notion of beauty and attractiveness using the ‘Look Good, Feel Better’ campaign that celebrates women’s beautification post-chemo hair loss to highlight this.⁴¹ This illustrates a direct link to the self-representation of illness (by beauty product

⁴¹ Although this focuses on the commodification of feminine beauty online, Pitts also discusses that there are positive benefits for women with breast cancer using blogs to communicate, however this project is focused on the way online spaces promote beauty and positive body image as a property of womanliness and traditional femininity.

companies) to a body image issue, where illness equals feeling-bad which equals ugly as opposed to looking-good equals feeling-good equals beauty.

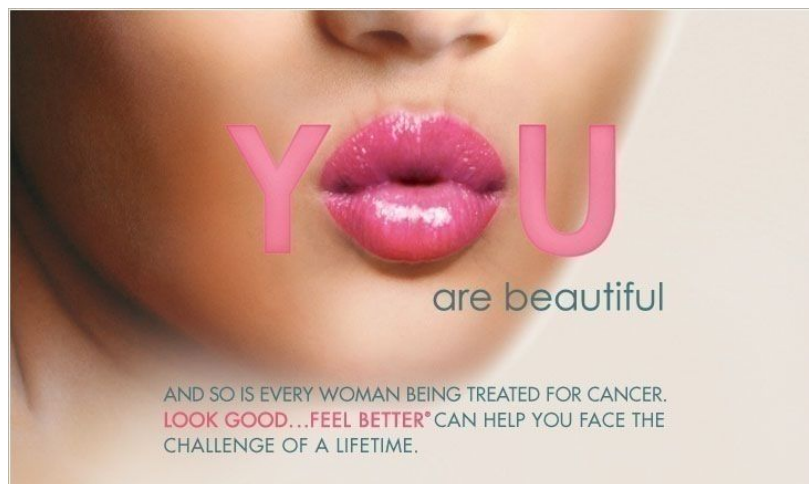


Figure 24. Look good feel better advertisement, web image.

"The impact of digital technologies on self-identified women's lives is grounded in materiality and embodiment"(Daniels, 2009, p.111). Whilst women go online to network and share stories, they cannot escape corporeality. The reflexive nature of these interactions reflects back on to the body. Karen Kendrick has done empirical research on these *Look Good Feel Better* campaigns and states that illness and cancer are seen as disabilities and that even the term disability is created to show a difference to 'normal' bodies and the very assumption of a normal and biological body coincides with gender and racial studies where these socially inscribed assumptions are simply untrue. In contrast to the 'abnormal' sick bodies the image of a 'normal' healthy body is the heterosexual female with "soft faces, long hair, often in dresses, feminine clothing and pastel colours" (Kendrick, 2008, p.264). Braidotti refers to Jackie Stacey's analysis of cancer in the postmodern condition as a result of health privatisation, where health is now a hyper-individualised responsibility that relates illness to social practices such as lifestyle, diet, fitness etc (Braidotti, 2006b). Judith Halberstam comments on the notion of positive thinking which is offered up as a cure for cancer and the path to self-made success in the U.S. as "far preferable to Americans than recognizing that their success is the outcome of the tilted scales of race, class, and gender"(Halberstam, 2011, p.3).

Daniels (2009, p.112) however sees some forms of online embodiment as examples of resistance to gender stereotyping in the women who use social networks such as pro-ana blogs or transgender sites to discuss their bodies. These women document visually and textually the physical shaping of their bodies by both uploading their photographs (bringing the body to the digital) and then making changes to the body offline (bringing the digital to the body). Rather than going online to escape embodiment or corporeality, as some cyberfeminists would suggest, these women are going online to learn how to transform their bodies offline.

From Cyberspace to Digital Everyday

Cyberspace doesn't really exist today, in that the notion of 'cyberspace' being a place where one goes in some sort of outer body meta-physical journey, where the body is escaped. In 2006 Alex Pang, Research Director at the Institute for the Future in Silicon Valley, marked the end of cyberspace as when the use of devices connected people without a conscious effort or awareness, where "we'll constantly access the first while being fully part of the second" (Pang, in Thomas, 2006). Nakamura describes the prefix as "one of the most irritating and ubiquitous prefixes of the nineties" claiming that "photography work, and social discourse no longer need be flagged as 'cyber' since we can more or less assume that in post-industrial, informationalised societies they usually are" (Nakamura, 2008, p.123).

David Bell (2007) insists on using the term cyber as a prefix, as he feels there is still merit in examining life with technology through cyberculture studies, and through many different relationships and interactions we have with technology, from daily Internet uses to digital filmmaking and biotechnology. The use of the word cyber, which comes from science fiction writing, most notably, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, in many respects belongs to the realm of science fiction and its place in contemporary thought is limiting due to its somewhat dystopian reference. However, as I write this I receive numerous emails from Groupon.com and eBay offering me deals for 'Cyber Monday', an American post-'Black Friday' online shopping holiday.

In defence of cyberspace or possibly another way of considering the term "cyberspace" Borer (2002) compares the lack of physical location of cyberspace with the equal lack of physical space in the concept of "society", however both have an impact on human social interaction, self-identity and affect our worldwide views. Certainly in online games such as Second Life one can escape the image of one's body for the moment they are there and, have interactions with strangers they would not usually encounter in their everyday non-digital lives. However, it is impossible to escape the body fully, it is therefore more valuable to examine what happens to a body that is presented online in a social aspect through an image of the self. I use the term 'digital everyday' to describe relationships between humans and technology. Drawing on Pang and Nakamura's dismissal of 'cyber' definitions based on life and technology being intertwined, 'digital everyday' may be a more useful definition. However, it is crucial to ground my research in cyberfeminist theory utilising it as a reference point to describe what was to come in terms of female subjectivity within the "informatics of domination" (Haraway, 1991). The intertwined relationships between being online and offline or indeed always being online or always "tethered to our devices" (Turkle, 2011, p.14) is one of the main focuses of this thesis. It is specifically concerned with the production and display of female subjectivity through art practices and digital everyday performance on social media. Through the exploration of the digital everyday performance of (white heteronormative) femininity on social networks it is possible to see how female subjectivities are formed *for* and *through* mass consumption and consumerist lifestyles. As online users, young women are producers and consumers that slip in and out of feminine tropes and subjectivities, performing for the network through the language of 'new media' and the image of the body.

Michele White explains how Internet spectators fail to achieve an ideal position in gaining control over body and interface. Through investigations of interactive artworks by Carol Selter, Susan Silton and Ken Gonzales-Day, White positions the viewer as "feminized" due to the representations of intimacy and self-touching encouraged by such works, she describes a kind of haptic viewing through close proximity to the screen (White, 2006, p.178). White describes the bodily pain of the computer user, gamer or programmer as an example of the

inability to escape the body but also shows examples of how gamers describe their bodies as “tools of the profession” and a “series of technologies” where a body in pain is a sign of weakness; this weakness is also negatively associated with the feminine (White, 2006, p.186). However, through men’s online discussions on the body, White quotes Kaja Silverman stating that these discourses around their bodies are usually associated with women or as a feminine act opening up opportunities for thinking of female subjectivity and the body differently (White, 2006, p.188). “These men are coded as feminine because they seem to exist within an excessively meaty and embodied state” (White, 2006, p.189). Moira Gatens and other feminist researchers indicate, “discomfort and repulsion toward the body accompany western thought and society” (ibid, p.190).

In *The Cyborgian Self: Towards a Critical Social Theory of Cyberspace* (2002), Borer argues against postmodern critiques of the human condition as a simulation or fragmented self (Baudrillard, Lyotard), in that there is no postmodern subject that is lost or transcends the body or the social actor; that cyberspace would not exist without social actors and in the absence of cyberspace social reality of the everyday still exists. Borer’s ‘Cyborgian Self’ is in relation to technology, and in a reflexive relationship with modes of technology as a communicative tool, where one affects the other. In contrast Rosi Braidotti utilizes the postmodern condition as a way to discuss the cyber-body, seeing the relationships between humans and technology as “co-extensive with and intermingled” (Braidotti, 1996, p.1). Braidotti states that her use of postmodernism is a careful appropriation that takes equal distance from the kind of “mainstream postmodernists who seize advanced technology and especially cyber-space as the possibility for multiple and polymorphous re-embodiments; and on the other hand, from the many prophets of doom who mourn the decline of classical humanism” (Braidotti, ibid). Braidotti’s cyborg is the ‘nomadic subject’ a posthuman subject, and the nomad much like Haraway’s cyborg is not the physical travelling kind but nomadism in the sense that it is “a kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour” (Braidotti, 1994, p.5). Braidotti uses parody as an example of how one can embody a nomadic state. She describes the work of artist Laurie Anderson as an example of

this in her use of the “as-if” mode and method of depicting a “high-tech kind of continuum between different levels of experience” (ibid, p.7). “It is the subversion of a set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling”(ibid, p.5). In this case, digital everyday users embody the cyborg and post-human subject however in their corporeal everyday do not exist as works of fiction as in Haraway’s cyborgian utopian dreams. Embodying the feminist cyborg that Haraway desires is compromised on social media platforms. It is not my intention to look at every online interaction by a woman as feminist, rather my interest is in how these practices of female subjectivity are so aligned with consumerist ideology that they work to perpetuate cultural norms and in this way problematise notions of self-chosen and self-produced subjectivity.

Agency and Regulation Online: From Live Journal to Instagram

There are many debates between feminist academics about whether agency is possible in online gender performance⁴². This form of self-produced subjectivity also complicates how representational studies can be used to address self-representation on social media. Laura Mulvey’s 1971 (1989) groundbreaking text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* addressed the representation of women on screen. Mulvey applied Freud’s theories of scopophilia and identification of the ego to deconstruct the production of the image of woman in Hollywood cinema. Mulvey’s argument is that women are placed on the screen as objects of male desire and the male gaze, they are passive bearers of voyeuristic pleasure and also the male spectator identifies with the male protagonist on screen to gain possession of the female character. However useful Mulvey’s theories have been to feminist theory their scope is limited on social media due to the unknown conditions of viewing and the fact that the representations of women in my investigation are self-produced. Michele White talks of Mary Ann Doane’s theories

⁴² For example the argument between Rosalind Gill and Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen, on the agency of young women wearing headscarves and young women who embody ‘porno chic’ culture. See: Gill, R. (2007b), Duits, L. & van Zoonen, L. (2006) , Duits, L. & van Zoonen, L. (2007).

of a female gaze⁴³ through feminine masquerade as a more useful way to look at the playing of identity on MOOs.

One way in which White states that women online disable and restructure an empowered gaze is through webcamming. Pleasure of viewing can also be disrupted with the glitch or interruptions within the networks, White phrases these as "spectatorial failures", her concern is with the spectator and positions of spectatorship in Internet viewing and how these networks complicate feminist film and critical theory in regards to these viewing positions (White, 2006, p.60). White (ibid.) argues that feminist accusations describing women on webcams as objects or that they are not in control are harmful and that we must consider women as spectators *and* producers. I would agree that we must look at how women assume agency and control on social networks through the curation of their images and their refusal to take part in objectified positions, but the activities taken up by women who turn the camera on themselves often fall into normative gendered positions. So yes, women are in control of the images as they produce them, but many perform activities closely linked with heteronormative white femininity such as makeovers, beauty, shopping and craft or with male sexual fantasies. This type of performance displays the influence of commodified femininity as seen in advertising and mainstream media.

White talks about the early cam girls such as Jennifer Ringley and her JenniCam site which ran between 1996 and 2001, where the nine webcams dotted around her apartment broadcast one still image every five minutes twenty four hours a day. White discusses the labour and skill of cam-girls as something that is downplayed in critical and popular literature, that they are reduced to status of 'cam-girl' suggesting that they "pander to spectators in order to receive gifts and other favours" (White, 2009, p.67). However in Terri Senft's ethnographical research into cam-girls and through her own experience as a cam-girl she states

⁴³ In relation to the male gaze Mary Ann Doane suggests the possibility of a female gaze through either "over-identification" where masochism creates a critical distance between woman and femininity, or through narcissism, "becoming one's own object of desire" (Doane, 1982, p.87).

that in the early days of camming, the 'girls' were charged so much for bandwidth that they made a loss or made very little through the 'members only' sections of their sites charging a small fee to receive extra material (Senft, 2008, p.20). Through this the 'girls' would end up working even harder creating and uploading more content to earn money and break-even.

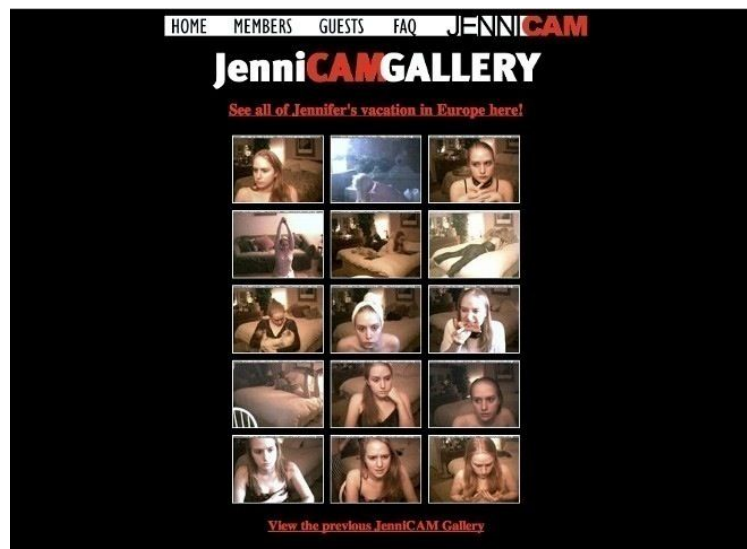


Figure 25. Still from Jennicam homepage, web image.



Figure 26. Composition of stills from Jennicam, web image.

There is also the question of voyeurism and the sexual pleasure that can be attained through watching webcams of the self professed 'real life' that JenniCam portrays, for although a lot of the time spectators observed an empty bedroom,

they were also able to view Ringley naked and occasionally performing sexual acts. On an interview for Letterman in 1998, Ringley stated that her site is not pornographic that it represents real life and that we are naked and have sex in real life so that's what people will see occasionally.⁴⁴ Krissi M. Jimroglou (1999), states that, "JenniCam challenges traditional definitions of the subject and poses a unique way to conceive of subjectivity and the agency and power that is implied therein", she describes Jenni's subjectivity online as emergent, multiple and ironic (Jimroglou, 1999, p.442). Ringley has been described as the "first self-made reality star, long before the Kardashians"(Reynolds, 2015). Jimroglou also compares Ringley to Haraway's cyborg through her hybridity and "confusing dichotomous boundaries such as body/machine, private/public and real/fiction" (Jimroglou, 1999, p.442). Senft discusses the evolution of the concept of voyeurism. She states that orthodox psychology defines voyeurism as a sexual fetish or the peeping tom, however in webcam culture voyeurism is multiplicitous where it is not only an act done onto someone but a simulation created by the performers themselves (Senft, 2008, p.45).

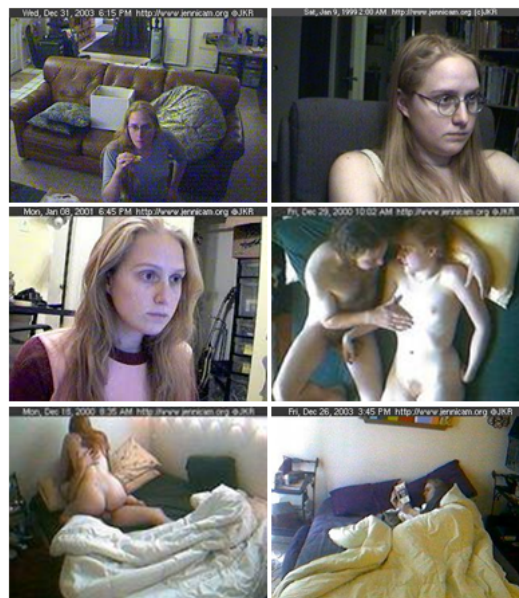


Figure 27. Compilation of *Jennicam* stills, web image.

⁴⁴ "If I happen to be naked then yeah...if I'm trying to portray real life then that's part of real life...most people assume it is pornography off the batt." (Ringley, 2008)

Through confusing these dichotomies Ringley clearly challenges how she is viewed as object to-be-looked-at, for she is the creator and subject of the gaze, she ultimately dictates what the viewer sees, and even though it is presented as a true representation of 'real life' she can always turn off the lights or move the camera from view. Counter to Mulvey's theories on desire and pleasure in looking, Jimroglou argues that through her demystification of mystery through the revealing of her private space or boudoir and the revealing of her 'real' female body as opposed to airbrushed bodies found on pornographic sites, "Jenni's natural body becomes the fetish" (Jimroglou, 1999). Ringley's claim that she is more "real" than television personalities raises the question of representation. As Senft states, Ringley also fitted in to this television body as a "tall, blonde, conventionally attractive woman in her twenties" (Senft, 2008, p.16). The fact that Ringley did not see her body as one that fitted in with the unreal representations of television bodies reflects a notion of 'reality' in terms of bodies online. Where television bodies are produced and constructed through hair and make up departments and dressed appropriately, Ringley's concept of reality is in her unedited body, where there is no professional team behind her image. This understanding of her body as one that is different to 'unreal' television bodies also implies how her whiteness is invisible. Noting her difference through her appearance masks how her subjectivity is that of a young white heterosexual American woman.⁴⁵

"There are no women", Rebecca Schneider quotes Marilyn Frye (Schneider, 1997, p.51). Schneider discusses how women who act against nature are deemed not real or are unnatural (such as lesbians), which in turn "exile(s) women to the paradoxical realm of reality which is always already fantastical, a really unreal-or, a reality which cancels a woman's status as 'real' in favour of her service to performativity, masquerade, representation" (Schneider, 1997, p.50). In this case being a 'real woman' is purely a representation of 'woman'; "she is always chasing

⁴⁵ In *White*, Richard Dyer (1997) states that "Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled"(p.3).

after it”(ibid, p.51). The representation of women in visual media culture is typically seen as produced by men or for the male gaze; women hold the position of consumers while men are producers. Schneider looks at feminist art practices as methods of revealing what Walter Benjamin termed the ‘dialectical image’⁴⁶. These dialectical images produced by women reveal what is not normally seen; they “show the show”(Schneider, 1997, p.52). It is possible then to align Ringley’s project alongside certain feminist art practices that work to reveal the truth behind the image and to “show the show”. Ringley’s comments that her life-camming is not art in the sense that there are intentional or conscious production decisions made in works by artists where the ‘reality’ in her project lies in its off the cuff/unscripted nature. She also argues that it is not pornography, and without these distinctions Ringley’s project tends to cause confusion. If lack of editing is Ringley’s defence for being a ‘reality’ project *The JenniShow*, an added feature on her website, where she becomes part of celebrity/reality fame that is so prominent in today’s social media life notions of authenticity and reality become blurred. In the *JenniShow* viewers are taken on journeys around Ringley’s apartment, to slumber parties or on tours of Washington DC. Ringley claims to be more real than television stars and as stated Senft (2008) is sceptical of this ambiguous claim and states that it raises questions about representation i.e. The claim of being more real than other women on screen. Ringley displays in this behaviour the traits of a micro-celebrity, a term Senft uses to describe online performances online “that involves people ‘amping up’ their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites”(Senft, 2008, p25). Ringley’s spin off reality TV show displays how she branded herself as a celebrity-type persona yet consistently stated how she was just a ‘real’ person like everybody else.

⁴⁶ “‘Dialectical image’ is a phrase coined by Walter Benjamin to refer to an object or constellation of objects which tell the secret—which reveal or expose the traces of their false promises, their secret(ed) service to the dreamscapes of capitalism. Dialectical images are objects which show the show, which make it apparent that they are not entirely that which they have been given to represent—the way cracks in face paint or runs in mascara might show the material in tension with the constructed ideal. Like secrets bared, dialectical images evidence commodity dreamscapes as bearing secrets, as propped by masquerade. For Benjamin, prostitutes present prime dialectical images. As ‘commodity and seller in one,’ prostitutes show the show of their commodification and cannot completely pass as that which they purport to be” (Schneider, 1997, p.52).

Although it has been argued that JenniCam was an early example of how webcamming 'real life' complicated typical viewing positions and the representation of women on screen, much of the conversation around JenniCam comes down to her body online. While she was in control of how her body was displayed through being in control of what the camera pointed at, visual pleasure has been described through what the viewer is denied or the possibility of what they might see. Smith (2005, p.93) talks of the suspension of disbelief through the times she is not present where the viewer must figure out what they are seeing. Burgin (2000, p.86) refers to the "fundamental law of the eroticisation of absence" to describe how her absence may also incite pleasure in viewing. Alternatively, White states that the 'closeness' of the body to the webcam also denies visual pleasure and that through the uploading of still images time is displaced and the narrative is broken. "For voyeurism to function, the view must seem under the spectator's control and to fulfil his or her desires. Yet in the webcam medium, the FAQs and other declarations, representations, and images resist the spectator's desires and demands"(White, 2006, p.79). By getting too close to the screen the 'cam-girl' is disembodied, frustrating male desire and gaining power "by making the ostensible views into their homes fail" (White, 2006, p.83). White explains how many webcam operators claim that the viewer is actually seeing more of themselves when they look at a live cam site than they do of the person they are watching, the screen then acts as a mirror for the spectator rather than a window. Female spectators have also commented on how watching the women web cam operators has given them body confidence (however this brings the issues back to the body) and also enables them to experience women as producers rather than consumers. This response from female spectators echoes Mary Ann Doane's argument that there is no gap between a woman and the image of woman, 'she is the image' (Doane, 1992). Women's identification with images of other women has been theorized through the acquiring of a type of lesbian gaze. White (2015) draws on Lewis & Rolley's (1996) theories of the lesbian gaze in women's magazines to explain how in online wedding photography practices such as 'Trash The Dress' images of women are produced to be viewed by other women through a form of

lesbian gaze. This lesbian gaze also extends to forums where women participants “pleasurably view and comment on photography sessions, dresses, and women’s bodies” (White, 2015, p.109).

Schneider quotes Frye in stating that “women” have been structurally blinded in order to keep them in the representational realm and that “‘the phallogentric scheme [can]not admit women as authors of perception, as seers’(1983:165). Such admittance would give “women” agency as producers”(Schneider, 1997, p.51). Schneider believes that capitalism led to women being placed in the private sphere where products were ‘man-made’ and women were consumers of such products. The notion of the domestic space as a feminine space where women are consumers is contradictory to the women who self-produce their image and subjectivity online; these women could be seen to be crossing over in to masculine territory and confusing binaries. Ringley’s project subverts these notions by using her domestic space as a form of media production. These notions of feminized domestic spaces and the production of media is addressed in terms of the culture of the bedroom in Chapter Six.

There are many arguments about the agency of women performing online, for if we look at Ringley she sits within and also outside of what Rosalind Gill describes as a postfeminist sensibility.⁴⁷ She subscribes to the surveillance culture and displays an empowered subjectivity as opposed to objectivity. However, Ringley states she was not so concerned about how she was received in the fact that she was not performing for an audience. She was not watching herself being watched, she was creating digital content⁴⁸ and this is White’s argument, that this type of labour should not be dismissed as her skills as a producer and computer

⁴⁷ Gill’s theories are elaborated on in greater detail in chapter three, she describes that as part of postfeminist sensibility as:

“The notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways that (some) women are represented; an emphasis upon self surveillance, monitoring and discipline; the dominance of a ‘makeover paradigm’; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked ‘resexualisation’ of women’s bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference” (Gill, 2007a).

⁴⁸ Senft states that Ringley was “justly proud of the fact that she hand-coded the HTML on her site” (Senft, 2008, p.19).

coder should not be reduced to her gender. However the body marked 'female' is hard to get away from, "she is preceded by her own markings"(Schneider, 1997, p.23). Senft questions why women are most likely to cam online and that why it is women web-cammers such as Ringley are perceived as doing nothing "when they are clearly doing *something*...Similar to camgirls, these forgotten cyborgs hardly ever figure in political conversations, unless the subject is pornography, prostitution, or the sexual display of children" (Senft, 2008, p.53).

Gender performativity according to Butler is something that exists prior to materiality, "it [gender performativity] is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the human" (Butler, 1993, p.7). We subconsciously perform gender according to the structures of the heterosexual matrix, which exists prior to us. Gendered bodies are not as such decided based on sexual difference; sexual difference and gender are performed through repetitive acts that govern bodies within the heterosexual matrix. Further to this regulation of gendered bodies, Butler states that the possibility of subverting the matrix is through *how* we repeat, "through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very norms that enable the repetition itself (Butler, 1999, p.189). Senft quotes historian Walter Kendrick in stating that "more than a 'thing', pornography "names an argument" about social and economic power in a culture", in this way Senft sees that the "camgirl—who traffics in a certain kind of power by violating the space between private and public—will always be equated with pornography at some point in her life" (Senft, 2008, p.77).

The problem for women web-cammers like Ringley is the fact that their agency is reduced to their sexuality, their presence in the 'public' space of the Internet was difficult for critics to analyse due to the non-pornographic nature of their camming. The fact that some women cammers did not perform pornographically denied simple definitions. Senft quotes Lauren Berlant who pointed out "how pornography works as a discursive tool for conservatives, being "flashed in people's faces" as a way to freeze political activism around such issues

as abortion, sexual harassment, sex workers' rights, and same-sex marriage, which are made to appear "ridiculous and even dangerous to the nation"(Senft, 2008, p.80). Schneider states: "It is not the contents within the frames but the decided nature of the frames themselves that 'ratify' or 'pornographize'" (Schneider, 1997, p.15). As I stated earlier, Ringley was not an artist but a self-proclaimed 'computer nerd' (Ringley, 2003) and although her server crashed and viewings rocketed when she was intimate or naked Jimoglou defends Ringley's popularity by claiming her presence whether naked or not was enough to demand viewings. Jimrouglou states that although Ringley claims to not having a feminist agenda this does not deny her influence on the fact that "those who follow in her footsteps may expand the uses of the digital camera" (Jimroglou, 1999, p.452).

Victor Burgin (2000, p.86) states that Ringley "reaffirms the fundamental law of the eroticisation of absence" through the control she has over when she is present and absent on screen. This form of pleasure through absence and glitches complicates how I theorised the glitches in the works in chapter one. When I was positioned in the gallery at the Lynn Hershman Leeson work *Lorna*, the absence of the work on screen and my inability to control the work led to my leaving rather than staying with it in the hope that the work would comply. This abandoning was due to the fact that I was sitting in a gallery, I was part of the work and was on display. Unlike the home viewers of Ringley's webcam who can sit for hours waiting for her to appear, I was complicit and publicly visible in the Hershman Leeson installation. Laura Mulvey discusses the dark conditions of viewing in the cinema as they isolate the spectator as another way to intensify relationships with characters on screen⁴⁹. It is in this relationship between the postfeminist subject of social media screens and the spectator of these screens that artists must manipulate and exploit as strategies of rupture and subversion.

⁴⁹ "Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer"(Mulvey, 1975, p.8)

Subversive Interventions

Schneider's statement on "The decided nature of the frames" is useful in exploring web-cam performers, and the Internet as a space for voyeuristic spectatorship and interaction. When Schneider used this phrase she was discussing the reactions to the controversial work of Robert Mapplethorpe. In 1990 the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati was tried for including Mapplethorpe's explicit photographs *Marty and Veronica/My Body is a Temple* and subsequently acquitted due to their "symmetry of classical formal properties" (Schneider, 1997, p.14). In Schneider's analysis the court used art as a way to 'ok' the work for public display. However, the frames of the screen and the platform of social media as a space to display artworks complicate their agency, specifically those featuring the female body. Do aesthetics and formal properties matter to the meaning of such images on social media due to how these spaces are controlled and female bodies monitored?

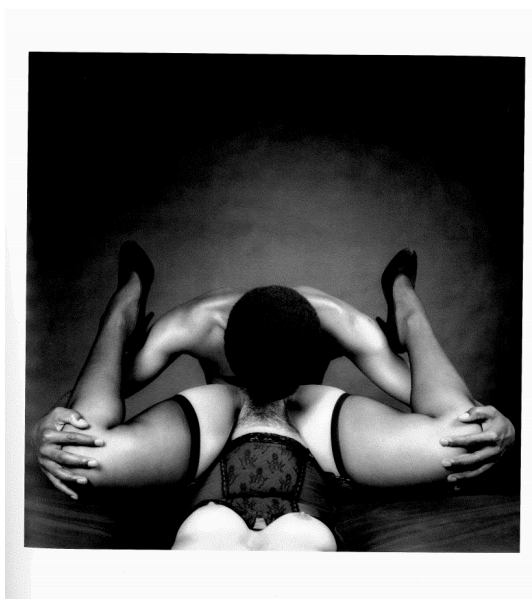


Figure 28. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Marty and Veronica*, 1982
Silver gelatin print, 38cm x 38cm

An early example of subversion among the cam-girls is described in Senft's chapter entitled *A tale of two tampons*. In this Senft discusses the unknowingness involved in uploading images to the Internet, how they will be received and how they can be re-circulated in a way that alters their intended effect. In 2001,

webcammer Lisa Batey (who was part of a webcam house) focused her cam on her used tampon in the toilet. When traffic increased on her site Batey realised her page had been redirected to from a 'gross-out porn site' with the heading "some girl ripped a bloody tampon out of her cunt and threw it in the toilet" (Senft, 2008, p.86). Batey claims this was not a publicity stunt, however discovered later that the owner of the site she cammed for was collaborating with a porn site to gain more traffic. Web cam artist Ana Voog posted three images on her LiveJournal blog page which caused the site's Abuse Team to pull them from the website, the first image was of a bloody tampon hanging from a vulva captioned "This is pussy", the second a used tampon captioned "Gotta get me soma dat", the third a pile of cut pubic hair with the caption "Lonely? Need a pet? Try my pubic hair! On sale now! To the highest bidder!!!" (Senft, 2008, p.87). The difference between Voog and Batey and even Ringley is that Voog called her camming art. Voog's images were confrontational and intended to garner a reaction. When LiveJournal reacted with pulling the photos off the site Voog kicked off and after eighty posts LiveJournal reinstated the photos. Although it may be implied that through being both producer and image webcammer's attain agency in their online performances the reality is that women made visible become subject to porn classification.

Voog's intentional provocation of LiveJournal exhibits more of a cyborg sensibility in her feminist work of revealing how performing against what is acceptable for women online is regulated. Her challenging of the platform was an intentional act that provoked a reaction. Voog pushed to see how far she could perform as a woman before the boundaries of what is acceptable were revealed. In many ways the examples in the chapter so far reveal cyborg subjectivities, but Haraway's cyborg does not belong to the category of 'woman' set by cultural norms. The unruliness of Voog & Batey in their use of menstruation to push boundaries of what is acceptable of women reveal the limits of agency in female subjectivity on social media, unless as in Batey's case it is re-produced for pornographic content. Cyborg interventions online become visible through the pushing of boundaries and the attempts by networks to make them invisible. By

attempting to 'show the show' the feminist cyborg reveals the limits in how much women are permitted to show online.



Figure 29. Ana Voog, *Pussy Causes War*, 2001, web image.



Figure 30. Ana Voog, *This is Pussy*, 2001, web image.

Instagram Regulations

Moving on from early webcammers this section looks at contemporary examples of interventions on Instagram that challenge the regulating of acceptable or appropriate bodies. These interventions follow on from the discussion on Ana

Voog's explicit and challenging Live Journal cyborg interventions. As I have stated, Haraway's cyborg is an attempt to move away from gender binaries and notions of female and male. In considering what constitutes being female the cyborg subjects in this chapter so far have attempted to reveal the construction of the subject and also to challenge what type of female subjects are acceptable. What happens in these cases is they either become sexualised or removed by moderators. However, by challenging these moderators artists like Voog reveal how women's bodies are monitored. In this section the women, some of whom are artists, challenge Instagram to reveal how images of women's bodies are regulated. Through their interventions these women embody a kind of cyborg subjectivity, however the fact that these bodies cause so much controversy highlights that what counts as subversive actually equates to subjects performing outside of normative, stereotypical white femininity.

Instagram guidelines

We know that there are times when people might want to share nude images that are artistic or creative in nature, but for a variety of reasons, we don't allow nudity on Instagram. This includes photos, videos, and some digitally-created content that show sexual intercourse, genitals, and close-ups of fully-nude buttocks. It also includes some photos of female nipples, but photos of post-mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding are allowed. Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too.

People like to share photos or videos of their children. For safety reasons, there are times when we may remove images that show nude or partially-nude children. Even when this content is shared with good intentions, it could be used by others in unanticipated ways. You can learn more on our [Tips for Parents](#) page.

Revolt and Regulation

Instagram 'Rules'

It remains important, however, to stress that the 'explicit body' and the violation of taboos embrace what was at that time – and is still – widely perceived as obscene. The making visible of menstruation, female sexuality and body hygiene, or the pronounced articulation of female sexual desire were not just means for their own ends. Those stagings and gestures, drawing on common notions of obscenity and their patriarchal ideological underpinnings, sought to intervene in the 'social relations of aesthetic production and reception, the social relations of signification', from political, feminist positionings (Mey, 2007, p.24).



Figure 31. Petra Collins, Twitter post of Instagram banned image, 2013.

On social media there is a fine line between performing 'good' female performances and 'bad' or slutty, in this section I look at female bodies that are

deemed 'bad', inappropriate, or unacceptable on Instagram. These performances have been set up to uncover just how monitored the presentation of female bodies is social media. There have been a number of cases of Instagram censorship of young women's bodies that illustrate sexualized double standards and sexist responses to certain types of female bodies. These are based on bodies that don't fit the norms of feminine embodiment. For instance exposed pubic hair in bikini shots. Photographer Petra Collins and Australian magazine *Sticks and Stones* have both had their Instagram accounts deleted for the exposure of pubic hair. Collins states that her images were not a violation of any of the terms of use stated by Instagram and the fact that she showed a body that didn't meet society's standards of femininity she was excluded. She also states that there are 5,883,628 images tagged #bikini on Instagram, hers was only different as it was unshaven (Collins, 2013). These two examples show how young women's bodies are regulated through the curation of images of types bodies that are deemed acceptable by the social networks. Breanne Fahs (2014, P.211) states that this type of regulation can be seen to reinforce notions of hetero-sexy femininity: "Pornography and popular culture idealize hairlessness and pre-pubescent female genitals (Schick, Rima, & Calabrese, 2011), with most mainstream pornographic films and images depicting hairless genitals as the 'industry standard' for genital beauty (Cokal, 2007)". Hair on the female body "from the forehead down" is a taboo in contemporary Western culture. Anneke Smelik (2015) discusses the hairless female-body obsession in semiotic and psychoanalytic terms. Smelik refers to the abject female body through Kristeva's thesis of the abject as:

Something that signifies an unstable boundary between the inside and outside of the body. Hair forms literally the boundary between the inside and outside of the body, and can thus be loathed as '[w]hat disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (Smelik, 2015, p.238).



Figure 32. Sticks and Stones magazine banned Instagram image, 2015.

And although when it was pointed out to Instagram that these images were not actually offensive or different to other bikini images they restored the accounts apologising and stating that they “try hard to find a good balance between allowing people to express themselves creatively and having policies in place to maintain a comfortable experience for our global and culturally diverse community” (Plank, 2015).

Another form of bodily abjection is menstruation, bodily waste that invokes disgust and signifies the maternal woman, not so much a signifier of sexual difference but a marker of the difference between man and mother (Grosz, 1989, p.76). Similar to ‘the tale of two tampons’ described above, in 2015 poet Rupri Kaur posted an image of herself lying on a bed with her back turned revealing a bloody spot on her trousers and on the bed sheets. The image was removed by Instagram and public uproar in response to the banning ensued. Kaur is an artist and consciously challenged Instagram with the image, stating they had responded how she hoped they would by taking the image down. Of course, not wanting to upset anyone Instagram soon reposted the image claiming that it was an “accident” (Kaur, 2015a). Kaur thanked Instagram on her tumblr page stating that it was the exact response her work was created to critique, that the image did not go against

any of their community guidelines as she is fully clothed and that the image is her own and it is not attacking a certain group, she goes on to say:

I will not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society that will have my body in an underwear but not be okay with a small leak. when your pages are filled with countless photos/accounts where women (so many who are underage) are objectified. pornified. and treated less than human. thank you Kaur, 2015b



Figure 33. Rupika Kaur, banned Instagram image, 2015.

Another notable ban on Instagram was American teenager Samm Newman who posted an image of herself in a bra and pants. Newman's 'plus size' body was thus deemed inappropriate by the Instagram moderators and removed. When the issue was pointed out Instagram reposted the image and apologised. However, the fact that this image and not other bikini shots are banned, Instagram's supposed 'mistake' reveals the inherent refusal to acknowledge bodies that do not conform. Susan Bordo describes the "preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness"..."one of the most powerful 'normalising' strategies of our century" (Bordo, 1993, p.186). Michelle Green states that in terms of 'undoing gender' as Butler states happens through repetitive acts, "fat women, find it harder to undo gender because they find themselves excluded from the practice of gender" (Green, 2015, p.186). Instagram is a space where young women attempt to undo gender through repetitive and subversive acts of abjection. In Instagram's efforts

to monitor these subversions through removal and trying to make these women invisible the social media sites draw more media attention to their body shaming practices and how they surveil the representation of women.



Figure 34. Samm Newman, banned Instagram image, 2014.

Artists Molly Soda and Ariva Bystrom have catalogued images that were removed from Instagram in a book. They held an open call for submissions to anyone who has had an image removed from the site due to the unacceptable nature of the image of the body. The main contributors to the book were white heterosexual thin women. The duo claim there are no exceptions as to who can submit but maybe their circle or followers are mainly “white abled cis young women, often pretty thin” and also that “these kind of people tend to feel more entitled to their bodies and feel more comfortable in showing them” (Bystrom & Soda, 2016). This visual discourse of able-bodied young white women feeling more entitled to share body images suggests that according to Soda and Bystrom non-white women do not engage as much in the provocation of Instagram with body images. The fact that the submissions were overwhelmingly by white women does not mean that the regulation of non-white bodies doesn’t happen on Instagram, but that the performance of ‘normative femininity’ is based around what Susan Bordo describes how: “homogenized representations of “whitified”

feminine beauty become normalized and function as models against which women continually measure, judge, discipline and correct themselves (2003). Delivosky goes on to state:

While white women clearly benefit from this arrangement, they are in many respects trapped in a gilded cage. For what is experienced as power and control is in fact the reproduction of normative white femininity whose practices are intended to regulate the white female body in docility and obedience to cultural and racial demands (Delivosky, 2008, p.58).

Sarah Banet Wiser states that within the performances by girls on YouTube the notion that there are clear steps to 'being a star' "renders invisible how bounded those steps are in terms of age, race, and class", where those who are culturally marginalised because of race or class, for instance, do not have the same access to the practice of self-branding as white, middle-class girls and women" (Banet Wiser, 2011, p.17).

Conclusion

Perceptions of choice, individuality and agency are offered online, but they are perceptions. As the Internet moved from a supposedly free and anonymous playing field where multiple identity play was encouraged through textual communication to a visual medium the notion of anonymity and identity tourism became less likely. Through the visibility of the body online, socially constructed assumptions of gender are applied to bodies. 'Being yourself' on social media sites is impossible due to as Schneider tells us: "the decided nature of the frames". The fact that young women are technically skilled in creating and coding online is mostly overlooked in favour of critique on how they look and whether they behave appropriately. Performing a so-called 'real self' as Ringley claims caused debates around whether her site was purely pornographic. Her visibility as a young white woman online who engaged in everyday activity which occasionally included sexual activity became known for just that, programming and coding skills aside.

The gilded cage of white femininity privileges visibility of a certain type of body and a certain type of behaviour, once this body steps outside of that cage it is marked as inappropriate and unacceptable. As in the case of cancer patients online, where illness is seen as an inappropriate trait of the 'normal' body, sick women are encouraged to engage in traditional feminine beauty rituals as a way to make them feel better. This so-called "feel better" empowerment works as a way to regulate women's bodies not empower them. This form of what Michele Lazar (2011, p.40) terms "emancipated femininity" works to make women think they are being freed from the burdens of their unruly bodies by investing in the consumption of products that ultimately work to control bodies. Similarly on Instagram the notable removal of images of women's unruly bodies that do not meet the standards of normative white femininity are seen as breaching the guidelines of appropriateness.

This chapter set out to look at the ways in which perceptions of freedom, choice and empowerment are sold on social networks. Focusing on a the way in which certain female bodies online are presented and received and how through the nature of the Internet heteronormative gender assumptions work to regulate the types of bodies deemed 'acceptable'. One of the key issues of this chapter was to highlight how intention and reception differ when using social media as a stage to perform agency, when bodies are so tied to gendered assumptions such as femininity being a trait of femaleness or womanliess being a bodily property. The examples used in this chapter also complicate notions of cyborg subjectivity as detailed in chapter one. Some theorists discuss these practices by women online as displaying cyborg sensibilities (Jimrouglou, 1998), however Haraway's cyborg is an ironic interruption to the networks of domination. In order for these practices to be considered cyborgian in Haraway's sense the performance of subjectivity must be carefully constructed through ironic play and not slip back into the realm of norms. Similarly Braidotti's politics of parody insist on an exposure of the workings around the construction of the subject Woman. In this sense the messages of choice and agency online are complicated. The issue for women who choose to perform as themselves online perform agency in choosing to be so, however the empowerment behind being "yourself" is repackaged by advertising campaigns or

pornography sites. Due to this many women performing on these forums tend to abide by heteronormative gender rules.

In the final part of the chapter I discussed performances that took the idea of performing the self outside of these gendered boundaries, and when they did they were made invisible. As part of my practice I used an app called Periscope that has been developed by Twitter. On Periscope users can live stream home videos on the site and they are available for 24 hours. I have detailed these works in Appendix A. My findings from these works were quite shocking. In my performances I posed for selfies. What I found was that the viewers of these videos who were live commenting hurled abuse at me as I performed. In the next chapter I look at types of performances and discourse that is aligned with postfeminist definitions. As with the freedom implied by the sites in this chapter to “be yourself” the following looks at how the messages become blurred and the lines between choice, agency and empowerment work to pigeonhole women rather than offer freedom.

I also addressed notions of authenticity in terms of performances that show ‘real’ bodies and the use of the word real as opposed to the ‘fake’ women on television, film and advertising. In the following chapters I look closely at performances of female bodies and the varying degrees of ‘realness’ they state to embody. As authenticity has become so important to the performance of femininity and female bodies I am interested in what happens when authenticity is played out and challenged in digital everyday instances and subverted through art practices online.

CHAPTER THREE

Constructing the Postfeminist Subject on Social Media

The duty of neo-liberalism, the mission to 'become somebody' reveals what has been termed 'the delusionary character of self-determining, individualistic and autonomous ideas of subjectivity' (Gonnick, 2001 in Walkerdine, 2003, p. 247). Here placed within the context of the theatre school – the marketization aspect of neo-liberalism is heightened, and the sell-a-bility of the body direct. We see a desired 'I will become this person and then I will be happy ever after' (Retallack, et al., 2016)

This chapter addresses performances by young white Western women on social media that display postfeminist sensibilities. How these sensibilities are performed raises questions about agency in the construction of female subjectivity online and highlight how young women are rewarded in these spaces based on how well they perform the neo-liberal postfeminist subject.

The first section of the chapter describes online activities that display postfeminist sensibilities. The second section explores two case studies where the performance of 'new femininities' online unravel, either through an 'authentic' public breakdown or through an 'inauthentic' performance by an artist.

I look more closely at the production of femininity and visualisation. Visualisation being in Braidotti's term is the "ultimate form of control" (Braidotti, 2006, p.204). These constructions will be addressed through a number of practices online that are aligned with white heteronormative femininity. I use examples of 'new femininities' to explore practices of female performativity on social media. First I look at theories around what has been termed 'new femininities'. These are examples of the types of female subjectivities that have emerged with social media and from third wave feminist politics. Postfeminist sensibilities are described by

Rosalind Gill as a consequence of neo-liberal ideals and mediated society. Moving away from traditional stereotypes of Western women in the media as subordinate or objects of the male gaze these 'new femininities' challenge perceived notions of femininity and act as agents of individuality and choice. The questions this chapter asks are whether these 'new femininities' are as freely performed as are implied by social networks and how are these different facets of female subjectivity performed on social media as both forms of resistance and regulation. I focus on two performances in terms of their 'realness' and authenticity, and the perception of authenticity in performed female subjectivity on Instagram. Model and microcelebrity Essena O'Neill's public 'outing' of the reality behind her famous Instagram modelling pictures reveal internal struggles with her body image and eating disorders and although hailed by many her manifestation into 'real woman' caused her to completely disappear from social media. In contrast to O'Neill, the artist Amalia Ulman spent a number of months performing a female masquerade on Instagram by posting images of her multiple transformations, from pretty girl to sugar baby to reformed woman. In this time no one suspected this as a performance and after Ulman revealed the ruse, her work was hailed as an Instagram masterpiece. There is a long history of women artists re-performing stereotypes of femininity and parodying common knowledge notions of what a woman is using their own bodies and performing to camera⁵⁰. As stated in previous chapters these ironic and parodic performances are aligned with cyborg and nomadic subjects. However the distance within the irony of these performances is crucial in their commentary on the regulations around female bodies online. In this chapter I extend the discourse on this type of feminist performance work into contemporary art practices on social media. I look at how young women self-produce digital content to share on social media, focusing on beauty practices and the encouragement of self-regulation of women's bodies gives an insight into the practices feminist artists are attempting to subvert. The similarities between the performances of 'digital everyday' performance and that of the artist online create challenges for these feminist art interventions. I analyse the cyborg potential in the work of artists online as they attempt to challenge the

⁵⁰ For example: Martha Rosler, Hannah Wilke, Suzanne Lacy, Alex Bag, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, Carolee Schneeman, Pipilotti Rist, Ana Mendieta, Orlan, Marina Abramovich.

systems of regulation in the performance of postfeminist sensibilities on social media.

Postfeminism as an Object of Critical Analysis

The body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it's a cultural construction that capitalizes on the energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature (Braidotti, 1994, p.169).

If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture (Phelan, 1993, P.10).

There have been many definitions of the term 'postfeminism' since the 1980s and much like cyberfeminism there are disagreements over what exactly postfeminism is or means. Differences of definitions within postfeminism are described by Gill and Scharff (2011, p.3) under four headings.

First: "An epistemological break within feminism [seen as a] maturing or coming of age of academic feminism (Yeatman, 1994), aligning itself with postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism to challenge 'hegemonic' Anglo-American feminism' with its dominant and colonizing voice' (Alice 1995, p. 11)" (Gill & Sharff 2011, p.4).

Second: Gill and Scharff (2011) describe it via Tasker & Negra (2007, p.1) as media influenced, where feminism is regarded as something in the past, not anti-feminist but rather a new, third wave, "uncomplicated by gender politics" (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p.1).

Third: The authors note as a "*backlash against feminism* [where] all the battles have been won" or a submission to the fact that women can't have it all. Whelehan's description of "retrosexism" refers to a nostalgic reinvention of the "real woman" and the "humorous cheeky chappies" that work "against cultural changes in women's lives" (Whelehan, 2000, p. 11).

Fourth: Is focused on Gill and Angela McRobbie's theories, McRobbie claiming an entanglement between feminist and anti-feminist discourse and Gill's approach; defining postfeminism as a 'sensibility' (McRobbie, 2004).

Gill and Scharff's account of postfeminism as an "object of critical analysis" is widely used amongst feminist academics to discuss postfeminism and in recent times more contested, I use it to define the 'type' of femininity I am addressing in my research (2011, p.4). Gill & Donaghue (2013) state: "contemporary media culture in the West is marked by a distinctively postfeminist sensibility, connected to neoliberalism" and reacts against a rigid second wave position on feminine consumer culture or in third wave language "girlie culture"(p.244). This shift in political agenda from the second wave to a politics of the body and embodied practices such as wearing high heels or nail varnish exhibits a move towards a consumerist ideology where the female individual and her needs are more important than the collective needs. This move towards the focus on the individual is a result of advertising and consumer desires and has seen a shift according to Gill and others in feminist politics since the early 1990s. McRobbie marks 1990 as the time when women supposedly became emancipated from second wave feminism, no longer did women have to worry about letting the side down as the rise of 'female individualism' appeared (2009, p.16). Drawing on the theories of sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, McRobbie claims: "as the old structures of social class fade away, and lose their grip in the context of 'late or second modernity,' individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their own structures"(ibid., p.14). McRobbie uses examples of self-monitoring practices such as keeping diaries and the rise of personal advisors and lifestyle coaches to illustrate this focus on individualism. These new structures are evident online in blogs, selfies, fitness and beauty videos.

McRobbie (2004, p.255) references Judith Butler's examples of entanglement in her book *Antigone's Claim* describing the postfeminist condition as a "double entanglement" comprising of "the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life, with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations". Also part of this double entanglement is the dismantling of feminist

politics towards a more self-centred “feminist politics of the body” (McRobbie, 2004 p.13). Another fallback of this double entangled postfeminist culture is the dominance of white femininity that has “become an invisible means of rolling back on anti-racism... seen at work in the idea of a nostalgia for whiteness”, for example in burlesque star Dita Von Tesse’s style who promotes a “powder puff whiteness” or in the down market magazines celebrating celebrity footballers wives with their white skin and blonde hair (McRobbie, 2009, p.42). This invisibility of anti-racist critique is a result of the construction of an already all-knowing, informed individual. Peggy Phelan discusses how visibility politics “lead to the stultifying ‘me-ism’” where “the spectator can valorise the representation which fails to reflect her likeness, as one with “universal appeal” or “transcendent power”(Phelan, 1993 p.11). Michele White discusses how the over-whitening of the skin disrupts traditional images of white femininity. In *Producing Women* (2015), White discusses the practices of Zombie Brides as posing “feminine whiteness as multihued, changeable, deathly, and unappealing instead of the more usual construction of it as stable, enlivening and beautiful” (White, 2015, p.132). Similarly Ferraday (2014) discusses MAC makeup as a form of non-traditional femininity, although part of the umbrella term ‘femininity’ since they are a make-up brand, their non-traditional style aligns them more with queerness and Ferraday states femininity has always been queer.

Examples of postfeminist sensibilities can be seen in the digital everyday through the keeping of blogs, production of YouTube videos and the presentation of the self on social media through images such as the selfie. Gill discusses how these mediums of representation such as web 2.0 complicate existing literature in feminist media studies through the rise of self-representation and the blurred distinctions between producers and consumers. The main attributes of this postfeminist sensibility Gill states are:

The notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways that (some) women are represented; an emphasis upon self surveillance, monitoring and discipline; the dominance of a 'makeover

paradigm'; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked 're-sexualisation' of women's bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Gill, 2007a)

Gill goes on to state how these themes:

Coexist with, and are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to race and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender, yet, as we argue below, structural accounts of power relations -particularly gender-are systematically excised from postfeminist culture (Gill, 2007a).

This focus on 'acceptable' female bodies online also highlights what could be deemed an unacceptable female body. The regulations of social networks seen in chapter two and the proliferation of one narrow 'type' of woman or female body, aligned with the 'pornification' (Attwood 2006; Paasonen, et al., 2007) of women's bodies and a Barbie-doll aesthetic of the slim, white, young, sexy & hot (Jackson & Vares, 2013, p.2) woman shows how exclusionary these spaces are for what Dove⁵¹ call 'real' women. Again this relates to Schneider's theories on appropriate bodies. Michelle M. Lazar illustrates how the advertising industry promote "emancipated femininity", one that releases women from the shackles of their bodies or stress, such as being hair free, or fat free or oily skin free, the focus on female bodily beauty as an emancipatory act only works to re-instate appropriate forms of female beauty where hairy, oily, fat bodies are deemed inappropriate (M.Lazar, 2011, p.40). Or what Sarah Banet-Weiser describes as "the politicised rhetoric of commodity activism" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p.16). Again all of this empowering emancipation works as a way to give women the feeling of performing within a feminist fight for liberation while simultaneously playing into the hands of a consumer model of feminine beauty. Lazar also refers to McRobbie's theories on

⁵¹ Since 2004 Dove have been running the Campaign for Real Beauty, it encourages 'real women' of all shapes and sizes and racial backgrounds to feel beautiful, no matter what you look like. Johnston and Taylor describe this as feminist consumerism stating that Dove "encourages women to channel dissent and practice self-care by engaging with corporate marketing campaigns and purchasing beauty products"(2008, p.961).

personal choice and self-improvement stating: “new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably” (2009, pp. 35–6). Beverly Skeggs (1997) describes how ‘respectability’ defines social classes and that working class women perform respectability in order to be accepted in certain social situations. Failure to meet levels of respectability result in failed femininity. The idea now that everything is a feminist choice as if being a free empowered agent makes taking part in pole dancing classes, eating chocolate and shopping is “feminist” demonstrates what Nina Power describes as a “remarkable similarity between ‘liberating’ feminism and ‘liberating’ capitalism” (Power, 2009, p.27). Gill questions the *need* for empowerment or the “turn to agency” as a statement within postfeminist culture. If we are freely and independently choosing what we want to do as autonomous agents and denying any cultural influence on our gender performances this marks a turn towards a denial of the feminist project where the personal is political.

Postfeminism is described as a ‘sensibility’ rather than a movement or a political cause works to explain the application of a kind of neoliberal-heteronormative⁵² femininity to female bodies and the Internet serves as a place where this aesthetic can be seen within the self-representation of young women. Postfeminism in this respect is not celebrated, rather used as a way to describe an aesthetic that denies the need for feminist debate in a society where women’s battles have all been won. This postfeminist notion of emancipation is focused mainly on representation. There seems to be little debate amongst these emancipated women on the global issues of women’s rights, postfeminism seems only to apply to those white middle class western women who’s concerns on women’s rights are based on the right to chose to look or act a certain way in public without being objectified or having the freedom to self-objectify. Definitions of femininity according to online representation are central to this project. I look at how femininity is attributed as a bodily property and the

52 “Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

appropriate and inappropriate ways that femininity is performed through images of the body according to commodified ideals of what a woman *should* look like.

There seems to be an assumption in writing on postfeminism that the female subject of postfeminism is white, as can be seen theorised in the examples of postfeminist television shows by many postfeminist scholars and in the Instagram book of banned bodies. Jess Butler uses Foucault's analogy of the transformation of sexuality into discourse in the nineteenth century to describe how heterosexual whiteness is the norm within postfeminist discourse, as something that was "applied first, and with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes" (Butler, 2013, p.49). Butler's argument is that although postfeminism may be dominated by the image of white, middle class heterosexual subjects does not mean that non-white, non-heterosexual subjects do not perform postfeminism and that rather than excluding these demographics from postfeminist discourses it would be more productive to "rethink postfeminism in terms of 'cultural ownership'" (Butler, 2013, p.49). Within examples of non-white representation in postfeminist cultural products such as television shows, Butler uses Projansky's (2001) assertion that "when women of color are depicted in postfeminist representations, they appear 'as assimilated 'equal' beneficiaries of the same 'rights' that feminism has supposedly provided to white women,' while 'the specific intersection of gender and race oppressions that women of color may face in the US is ignored'" (ibid). To counter this argument Butler uses the singer Nicki Minaj as an example of a black woman who plays with subjectivity and the notion of femininity to subvert expectations through her "cyborg subjectivity" and is an illustration of Judith Butler's claim that gendered (and radicalised) bodies are an "imitation without an origin" (ibid p.53). Butler is also careful to assert the fact that the subject Minaj produces is unrealistic or that she is a commodity or part of a neoliberal celebrity construction, however Minaj's rupture of racial and gendered subjectivity opens up the discourse around not just a gendered version postfeminism but a radicalised one too.

'New Femininities' on Social Media

Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff carefully use the phrase 'new femininities', in "scare quotes"... "as a way of highlighting the social production and construction of gender and avoiding essentialism" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p.2). They also point out how in cultural and gender studies there has been a tendency to study "girls and women" alongside "masculinities" however the subject of femininity was not discussed (ibid.). This neglecting of the notion or construction of 'femininities' is the basis of their studies, as (historically) rather than the focus on "hegemonic femininity" as one that is produced or masqueraded, women and girl's subjectivity has been discussed more as something that is natural, or a bodily property. Within the postfeminist sensibility, femininity is a neo-liberal construct that focuses on the individual and the production of the self. 'Tropes of 'new femininities' are explored by feminist theorists via studies of reality TV shows such as: *Ten Years Younger* (Tincknell, 2011), *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky, 2009) and *16 and Pregnant*, and in popular films such as *Bridget Jones Diary* (McRobbie, 2009) and *Sex and the City* (Levy, 2005). The women presented in these shows are very much confined to their roles as 'women' in society, whether it is finding a man, being pregnant, having it all, desperate to lose weight and look good or be sexually empowered. These subjectivities are created based on postfeminist notions of 'woman' as white hetero-normative hyper-sexual consumers of individuality, and these ideals are sold to women under the guise of choice and empowerment, as-if this is what women want and do not have, to be empowered, in-control and independent.

In the preface Angela McRobbie states that the most vivid attribute of "new femininities" is the "expectation of equality" (Gill & Sharff, 2011, intro xi). The case studies I look at in this thesis do not all claim to be feminist as mentioned in chapter two. My feminist readings of these practices whether that is their intention or not is that they comply with postfeminist principles in rejecting feminism and the fact that mantras like 'choice' and 'empowerment' hide that there are still inequalities in terms of gender, sexuality, 'race' and class rights.

In Amy Shields Dobson's 2010 research into popular femininities and gender performance on MySpace, she uses the postfeminist sensibility model along with Schneider's theories on explicit female bodies in performance art to

look at different 'femininities' displayed and performed on the platform. Dobson's research focuses on popular tropes of femininity seen in new media culture such as 'hyper-feminine', 'hetero-sexy' or bold 'laddish' gender performances. Dobson's study focuses on digital everyday performances of female subjectivity as opposed to performance art highlighting the stereotypes self-produced by young women. These 'new femininities' are aligned with postfeminist performance in their transgressive nature. Figures performing "hetero-sexy" or laddish subjectivities move away from traditional notions of femininity however these transgressions tend to highlight further inequalities rather than emancipated femininity.

Dobson's phrasing of the term hetero-sexy is useful to my project stating that she uses it as opposed to 'sexualisation' of girls bodies, as if it is something done onto the body of the woman/girl by an external force or that she is intentionally imposing it onto herself. Rather it serves as more of a descriptive term of "symbols, fashions, poses, and behaviours invested with normative 'sex-appeal' in recent popular culture"... "which does not necessarily imply a clear sense of either agentic choice or lack thereof" (Dobson, 2010, p.46). 'New femininities' could be looked at in the sense of women "having-it-all", the combination of hyper-feminine aesthetics and laddish attitudes places these performances in positions where women must look like women but act like men, or 'anti-feminine' to get ahead.

Renold & Ringrose (2011) draw on Deleuze's and Braidotti's theories of schizoanalysis to describe the 'schizoid subjectivities' teen girls must perform through pushes and pulls of being sexual agents and victims of 'sexualisation' simultaneously. They reject the moral panic placed on the 'sexualisation' of teenage girls stating that there is little ethnographic research done with girls themselves. Whilst I haven't undertaken ethnographic studies in my research into these performances of female or teen-girl sexuality, Ringrose & Renold's studies add to the framework of exploring how young women and teen girls perform online which in turn informs how feminist art practices draw on such gender performances online. Examining Bebo profiles and interviewing teenage girls about their choices for wallpapers, language used, interactions with friends and profile pictures, Ringrose & Renold (2011) illustrate how girls negotiate a neo-

liberal capitalist society. Where 'sexualised' appropriation is growingly affecting younger women and teen girls and how feminist theory needs to focus less on the effects on these girls but rather how they navigate their way around and through these terrains. They suggest using theories of 'becoming' and 'assemblages' to look at how teen girl's appropriate porno-culture symbols such as the playboy bunny but use them in a more innocent or less objectifying manner (ibid). They also suggest that the sexualized language used in profiling oneself as a 'slut', in the form of a postfeminist masquerade (McRobbie), the girls queer and subvert this language by calling each other *their* "whores" or "sluts" (ibid, p.396). They suggest that by using these symbols and language the girls interact with these notions of sexuality but don't actually perform them, for example they don't wear bikinis but use them as symbols.

Girls and young women performing online do fall into and re-appropriate hyper-sexual culture however, Renold and Ringrose (2011; 2008) suggest that there are ruptures within these that do not always fall into moral panic discourse by many feminist theorists. 'New femininities' could then be seen as transgressions of traditional femininity where performing female subjectivity online demands young women to align themselves more with a pornified or sexualised new media culture. Through the production and sharing of self-produced images on social media young women trivialise the argument between agency and passivity. In many ways agency is not lost in the production of the images but in the consumption of them after they are shared online. Ferraday (2014) also states that by looking to these performances as either subversive or indicative of agency is an all-too-familiar feminist move and it is impossible to make such a judgment like this (Ferraday, p.147). I find it useful therefore to use the analogy of the schizoid subject to explore how these performances slip in and out of such tropes of resistance and regulation.

The concept of 'new femininities' is used to explore the performance of female subjectivity online as something that has emerged due to social media developments in visual representation. The practices in this chapter engage in both sides of this conversation. They move in and out of female gender

assumptions looking at how young women online perform 'appropriate' and also 're-appropriate' gender norms through representation of the body online.

The Makeover Paradigm

In this section I introduce two practices on social media that illustrate what Gill describes as a postfeminist sensibility. I look at the makeover paradigm as seen on social media, where notions of femininity are considered a bodily property. These practices also exemplify Beverley Skeggs' theories on classification of femininity. Drawing on Smith's (1988) theories of the production of femininity through discourse, Skeggs explains how becoming feminine "occurs in the spaces of textually mediated discourse, in the dialectic between the active creating subject and the organization of her activity in and by texts, produced in the interests of a wider global market" (1997, p.98). Skeggs' research on performing gender through class structures shows how properties of femininity are acquired and performed by women in various situations in order to participate in a culture where femininity garners success. By exploring how these systems work we can see how "femininity is an institutionalized sign that also operates as a form of cultural capital" (ibid, p.116).

The performances looked at in this section perform typical markers of femininity such as wearing make-up and shopping. However, the way they are presented works to mask the fact that they are conforming to traditional markers of femininity. Through practices of misrecognition in the #nomakeupselfie to playing down one's subjectivity to 'be just like you' these performances reveal the complex messages played out by young women online where authenticity and agency are used to mask their alignment with economic gains. In discussing these practices as influenced by consumerist markets I do not wish to imply that purely because the women benefit financially there is a problem, rather that their gains are made through a compliance with an industry that plays on women's body image insecurities and femininity as a social marker.

#NoMakeupSelfie

In Chapter Two I discussed Victoria Pitt's research on women's cancer blogs, where shared stories and experiences created a space for what Pitt's termed

'cyber subjects' to engage in. However campaigns such as 'Look Good, Feel Better' still focus on the necessity for women to focus on feminine beauty thus commodifying illness as an issue of beauty and femininity as a bodily property of women.

In 2014 the trend of no makeup selfies circulated social networks, women nominated each other to take a selfie without makeup as a challenge in a means to raise money for cancer charities. Deller and Tilton (2015) state that the campaign grew out of the backlash actress Kim Novak received at the Oscars where her appearance was criticised, resulting in women taking their own so-called no makeup selfies in solidarity with Novak. This act of solidarity can be seen as an online political act, however once it became a trend and grew in popularity it quickly became commodifiable. I see this as a form of what McRobbie describes as a double entanglement. The trend then grew and was appropriated by the charitable cause where women would take a #nomakeupselfie and post an image of the monetary donation made to a cancer charity. This viral campaign provoked mixed opinions, on the one hand these women are donating to charity and performing for a good cause, on the other hand the seeming sacrifice of wearing no makeup and being brave enough to share an image of your face in such a state caused concern for critics who felt that this absurd act of charity simply reduced women to image-obsessed narcissists.



Figure 35. UK Actress Kim Marsh's #nomakeupselfie on Twitter.

Debra Ferreday (2014) argues that feminist criticism of no makeup selfies as performing or aligning with fashion and beauty industries in the 'media effects' model is harmful to the performance of femininity that she states, "is always queer". Femininity is a construction that does not belong to individual women. However the focus on makeup as something that is inherently female as seen in the #nomakeupselfie and something that 'all' women do illustrates that there is still a perpetuating idea that this is the status quo for 'all women', and that queering these assumptions happens through failure or bad 'bare-faced' images. Judith Halberstam tells us failure is not necessarily a negative thing; "failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well"(Halberstam, 2011, p.3). Halberstam offers an alternative to feminist strategies of becoming, positivity and reform with her term "shadow feminism", one she states "speaks in the language of self-destruction, masochism, an antisocial femininity"(ibid, p.124). The masochism involved in performing the #nomakeupselfie is only masochistic in its performance of anti-femininity, however the fact that the performance is so radical an act and really only a one off for the cyber subjects who perform them negates the potential for unbecoming. If considered in terms of the ironic cyborg subject, stated earlier in Haraway, the ironic distance is not enough to be critical of that practice. Performing a #nomakeupselfie as a radical act only works to re-enforce how important wearing makeup is. These practices, performed by women in digital everyday social media back up theories around emancipated femininity. These practices show how important wearing makeup is for women rather than freeing them from it.

I agree with Ferreday's thesis that situations like the #nomakeupselfie should not be reduced to "a single ideological sign", but it also troubles me that with this visual culture of sharing and posting images of the self that many young women *do* feel the need to look feminine so as to not appear to be failing (Ferreday, 2014, p.147). The 'one time only-ness' of the #nomakeupselfie stands up to the notion that women are image obsessed or that wearing makeup everyday is something common to 'all women'.

The Makeup Tutorial Video

This culture of makeovers and women's involvement in the beauty industry has been well demonstrated with television culture in reality television shows such as *The Swan*, *What Not To Wear*, and *Ten years younger*⁵³. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theories on "the world of consumer culture and the function it plays in managing and reproducing class hierarchies" McRobbie sees these makeover programmes as examples of neo-liberal class structuring where working class women are subjugated to a lower class level based on their lack of care in their physical appearance (McRobbie, 2009, p.126). Expanding on Bourdieu's theories in this subject to look at how television programmes produce classed subjects through "verbal violence", McRobbie enlists Butler's theories of subjectivity and subject formation as a result of this focus on the body as social signifier⁵⁴. Women who are named as such are socially and culturally assumed to perform femininity and these TV shows highlight this. Ringrose & Walkerdine (2008), draw on Julia Kristeva's theories describing the subjects of these TV shows as 'abject'⁵⁵. "If we think about what is and has been demanded of women, who have always had to be desirable, presentable, consumable, we can think about what is happening under neo-liberalism as an intensification of the feminine as site (both subject and object) of commodification and consumption"(Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008, p.230). The markers of femininity in these instances highlight how class is enforced as a marker of beauty, where working class women who do not comply with middle class bodies are failing. This brutal and explicit transformation where 'real women' get dramatic makeovers to look more feminine or seeking 'perfection' in itself uncovers the construction of femininity as classed, gendered and raced.

⁵³ See Featherstone (2010); Tincknell (2011); Pitts-Taylor (2007); Coleman (2011); McRobbie (2009)

⁵⁴ McRobbie is specifically talking about TV programmes like Trinny and Suzannah's *What Not To Wear* where the subject of transformation is generally working class. McRobbie states that the verbal violence used against the subjects in these programmes "legitimizes in the wider culture, the saying of similar offensive things (McRobbie, 2009, p.139).

⁵⁵ Abject bodies for Kristeva are "an operation of the psyche through which subjective and group identity are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's own (or one's group's) borders. The main threat to the fledgling subject is his or her dependence upon the maternal body (Oliver 1998, p. 2)" Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008). Ringrose and Walkerdine (ibid) use the abject to describe how class is defined in contemporary subjects, where women who do not comply or fit in between the borders created around middle class bourgeois notions of femininity are marked abject.

In a recent study of postfeminist sensibilities on women looking, Riley, et al., (2016) state: “validation was associated with pleasure, but positive evaluations bound our participants to a postfeminist sensibility where successes and failures were measured through their ability to achieve hyper-feminine looks”(p.105). Their study revealed that the women in their research were less concerned with how men saw them than other women, and this sizing up of one’s self to other women is a result of neo-liberal individualisation of subjectivity. This is also addressed in Michele White’s description of the lesbian gaze on wedding dress blogs, extending Reina Lewis’ (1997) research on the lesbian gaze in magazines.



Figure 36. Vlogger Zoella. Image from YouTube.

Using the models provided by these neo-liberal, postfeminist theories and sensibilities to look at make-up tutorial videos on YouTube we see an extensive range of DIY videos produced by young women, most but not all focusing on traditional tropes and images of femininity in ‘How to’ videos. British award-winning vlogger and microcelebrity Zoella (real name Zoe Sugg), born in 1990, is a YouTuber and self professed “writer and enthusiast of all things beauty, fashion and life”(Sugg, 2016) Sugg epitomises the postfeminist subject; starting her vlog on YouTube in 2009 Sugg posts makeover videos and haul videos to her page. Viewers can take tours of her bedroom and see her being silly with her brother or her friends. Since starting her channel ‘Zoella’, Sugg has over 10,000,000 subscribers to her channel, she has published a book called *Girl Online* and has her own make-up line in Superdrug. Her entrepreneurial career of beauty products

and books display how Sugg has used her YouTube popularity to become an empowered businesswoman. Of the 256 videos posted (on 28/01/16) almost half are concerned with beauty makeovers and shopping 'hauls'⁵⁶. A number of Sugg's videos also involve her current boyfriends, other vloggers or her brother and there are around six videos of makeovers gone wrong where she gets her brother or a blindfold guest to do her makeup. Although these 'gone wrong' videos draw on Ferraday's use of the term queer, they are generally titled as 'worst' make-up, which places them in contrast to 'normal' makeovers which are the videos that display normative, feminine beauty as in the #nomakeupselfie trend. Suggs very fittingly displays many characteristics of the 'postfeminist gaze' (Riley, et al., 2016). That this 'worst' makeup video is not ironic and the fact that it is considered in opposition to best or normal maintains its position within the bounds of regulated feminine beauty.

Zoella's channel exemplifies the makeover paradigm as well as the neoliberal display of commodity fetish through her fifty or more videos of hauls most of which are done in high street shops such as Primark. The popularity of the channel exposes the impact that this practice of neoliberal postfeminist performance has on YouTube audiences. Jerslev (2016) claims Sugg's fame and popularity is achieved through the perceived authenticity of her performance. She addresses her fans by speaking directly down the camera lens, telling them how much she loves them and down-playing her makeovers reiterating how unprofessional she is. This display of authenticity works to increase popularity where viewers can relate to Sugg's 'real' problems. This perceived authenticity in the "I'm just like you" manner works to mask the fact that this channel is a huge source of revenue and endorsement. The commercialisation of the performance confuses the notion of authenticity. The performing of authenticity in the world of the microcelebrity is key to their success. As seen in the *JenniShow*, viewers tuned in to see her 'real' life and Ringley described herself as a 'real' woman in contrast to the fake women in film and television. The interest in the 'real' is what draws viewers in, and for

⁵⁶ Haul videos are when vloggers purchase goods and make a video where they 'show and tell' what they have bought to their audience.

Suggs and other YouTubers authenticity is key to creating a successful and lucrative brand.

The Haul Video

"Interactivity is another name for shopping, as Christine Tamblyn put it, and hyper-real gender identity is what it sells" (Braidotti, 1996, p.10). Bridges & Harnish (2016) describe haul videos as "short videos in which young women not only present their fashion and beauty purchases but express their evaluations and opinions as well". Typing the word "haul" in to a YouTube search today I got "about 14,600,000 results" (YouTube search, 4/02/16). Jill Walker Rettberg uses Alice Marick's definition of "an effective neoliberal subject", as someone who, "attends to fashions, is focused on self-improvement, and purchases goods and services to achieve 'self-realization' ... He or she is comfortable integrating market logics into many aspects of life, including education, parenting, and relationships. In other words, the ideal neoliberal citizen is an entrepreneur" (Walker Retteberg, 2014, p.24).

In her 2011 paper *"The Revolution Will Be Soooo Cute: Youtube 'hauls' and the Voice of Young Female Consumers"*, Laura Jeffries looks at haul videos produced by the "smiling faces of American 'nice girl' culture" (Jeffries, 2011, p.62). From this research Jefferies deduced that the biggest and most popular haul videos, based on views and comments, were produced by white middle and upper class teens and young women, and that the products mostly 'hailed' included "fairly expensive makeup along with clothing from major brands and mall stores" (ibid, p.59). Jeffries suggests "hauls and their attendant comments provide important information about this segment of contemporary youth culture and its maintenance of longstanding gender tropes" (ibid, p.60). Jefferies also displays a frustration at the lack of any in-depth or meaningful comments or discourse, where everyone is complimentary and when some vloggers display videos speaking about products they don't like, their language takes the form of inoffensive and apologetic and in the case where someone is totally negative the comments underneath are usually negative too; there is a value placed on positivity.



Figure 37. Bethany Mota, *Fall/Winter Clothing Haul! (H&M, Urban Outfitters, Aero+more!)*, 2013. Haul video, web image.



Figure 38. Bethany Mota, *Clothing Haul: F21, Topshop, Aero, Love Culture*, 2014. Haul video, web image.

One of YouTube's most famous 'haulers' is an American teenage girl named Bethany Mota, her first video upload titled *First Video :) Mac and Sephora Haul* has over 4.5 million views, and her channel has nearly ten million subscribers. This is from the 'about' section on her channel:

Hey, I'm Bethany!

(You can call me Beth) and I'm a teenage girl from California. I make videos about hair, makeup, fashion, DIY projects, and basically anything that I love. I hope that my

channel can put a smile on your face and give you some cool ideas. So join in and be a part of the family! :)

xoxo,

Bethany Mota

"Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind. "

BeYOU(tiful)

ATTENTION: My business e-mail for opportunities and inquiries is:

macbarbie07@gmail.com

1 Samuel 16:7 - "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

God Bless

(Mota, 2016)

This 'about me' section is an example of the language Jeffries refers to above, Mota wants to make people happy and tell everyone they're "BeYOU(tiful), this play with the word beautiful to make up the words be you or 'be yourself' is the postfeminist neo-liberal mantra. Mota's email address is macbarbie- mac as in the make-up brand and Barbie as in Mattel's Barbie doll. However Mota's use of MAC and Barbie do not necessarily align themselves to regulatory practices of femininity. Ferraday claims that MAC makeup although a highly popular consumer driven company is more aligned with queer images that thinking about femininity as a known or individual thing. In her book *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls* (2007), Kim Toffoletti asks the reader to consider Barbie through her plasticity and her potential as transformative object rather than a fixed signifier for female subjectivity. On her channel Mota has posted 439 videos (as of 30/09/16) of those videos over half are either titled haul or beauty and makeover tips and tutorials.

Mota's channel is directly focused on the use of beauty and fashion products through demonstrating how they are used or worn. Her collection of beauty and fashion focused videos (apart from 6 Halloween makeovers) stick within a Seventeen magazine image of natural white femininity. Mota's creation of a microcelebrity YouTuber not only enhances her career but also creates revenue for the companies she endorses on her channel. This self-commodification of the microcelebrity through norms of feminine body image and practices associated with women such as shopping are an example of how the self-brand is formed in line with beauty industry norms.

Sugg has created a self-brand with Zoella; her products are stacked on the shelves of beauty departments and bookshops, Mota created a self-brand through her endorsement of beauty and fashion products. As I trawled through Mota's videos on her channel, the sheer volume of content she has created on YouTube struck me. Her videos are all edited and many look like music videos. The effort and skill in creating this digital content must not be ignored. I found myself wondering just how many different ways one could makeover the same face and have the energy to do it every week for 6 years. I will discuss it in my practice later, but that was one thing I found difficult when creating online content or trying to gain followers was that you must be online all the time, it is a full-time job. This form of labour is sometimes overlooked in regards to beauty vloggers, not only are they performing for the camera but they are lighting, filming and editing the works themselves.

I am also drawn to the spaces these videos are produced in. Vloggers use bedroom spaces to create their YouTube videos and bedroom tours are also popular (922,000 in search on 2/01/17). In their 1976 essay *Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration* Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber coined the phrase "culture of the bedroom" to describe how working class British girls use these domestic spaces to engage in cultural activities such as make-up or listening to pop music at a time when boys had more freedom to be on the streets engaging in their own cultural practices (McRobbie & Garber, 1975, p.213). Mary Celeste Kearney notes how McRobbie and Garber's text has been used in contemporary studies of girls media practices that focus on the "consumerist framing of bedroom culture", she

warns that this analysis excludes how young women used their bedrooms to produce media of their own (Kearney, 2007, p.130). So while I may focus on the fact that most of the videos and images I examined in my research focus on consumerism and the production of femininity through mass media, it is important to recognise the skills involved in creating these highly produced videos and this labour sometimes goes unnoticed as researchers focus on a negative or consumerist viewpoint. Kearney believes that through the use of the Internet as a method of distribution contemporary female youth are "reconfiguring" their private spaces, not retreating to the private as Nancy Fraser describes "subaltern counter publics" (Kearney, 2007, p.138).

These practices are difficult to analyse in terms of their agency, again they belong in McRobbie's double entanglement. They perform the role of empowerment and are skilled practices of media production, however their alignment with consumer culture and beauty only works to position women as objects of beauty.

Performing 'Perceptions' of Authenticity on Instagram

It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle (Baudrillard, 1981, p.10).

If we think about what is and has been demanded of women, who have always had to be desirable, presentable, consumable, we can think about what is happening under neo-liberalism as an intensification of feminine as site (both subject and object) of commodification and consumption. The new importance of the feminine is intimately linked to the rise of the psychological subject, a rational subject of choice, flexibility, who has to have the necessary skills to succeed in the constant necessity to change oneself and cope with

constant instability across major sites of social formation—education, work, family (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p.230).



Figure 39. Essena O'Neill, Instagram image, 2015.



Figure 40. Essena O'Neill, Instagram image, 2015.

In this section I look at the performance of new femininity on Instagram. I have chosen two performances that reveal the workings of Instagram whereby young women are encouraged and supported by those around them, their followers and corporate companies to perform within the norms of contemporary female

subjectivity. The subjectivities performed here are aligned with postfeminist sensibilities as well as the self-brand, microcelebrity star of social media. Within the performance of the microcelebrity there is a focus on authenticity, as seen in Zoella's vlogs, personal stories and sharing information are popular to followers. Authenticity is essential to the self-brander, Sarah Banet-Wiser explains how we take for granted that the 'authentic' self is "branded, managed and distributed" (2011, p.85). However authenticity in the postfeminist self-brander is easy for young, thin, white, women, as they are the most commodifiable female subjects. Banet-Wiser (ibid) states that women of colour and working class women are always "'at risk" of failing due to their bodily property, where postfeminism claims to be inclusive to all women, social norms are enforced outside of their control. This section looks at the performances of two young white women performing postfeminist self-branding on Instagram. These performances are examined in how they play with authenticity, one being a teenage girl and an Instagram microcelebrity and the other an artist performing ironically. I have placed these two practices together as I want to look at the nuances of using Instagram as a performance art platform and how alongside the performance of the microcelebrity the two cross over.

First I focus on the Instagram scandal by self-brander and microcelebrity, Essena O'Neill. O'Neill's celebrity was based in the hundreds of thousands of followers she had on her Instagram account. O'Neill was an Australian 18 year old, tall, thin, blonde, white, tanned girl who until she quit Instagram had over half a million followers and made an income from her Instagram images through the endorsing of products. Like Mota, O'Neill was a self-brand; in her images she was sponsored to endorse products. From the age of fourteen O'Neill posted images of herself on Instagram wearing clothes given to her by companies, she states on her website that she became the thing that made her feel so insecure from her early teenage years. Before quitting Instagram in 2015, O'Neill decided to reveal the lack of authenticity in the images she had posted, as a way to show young girls how fake her Instagram lifestyle performance was. O'Neill's reveal consisted of changing the image captions to describe what was 'really' going on at the time the picture was taken. O'Neill wrote statements like 'NOT REAL LIFE' under her

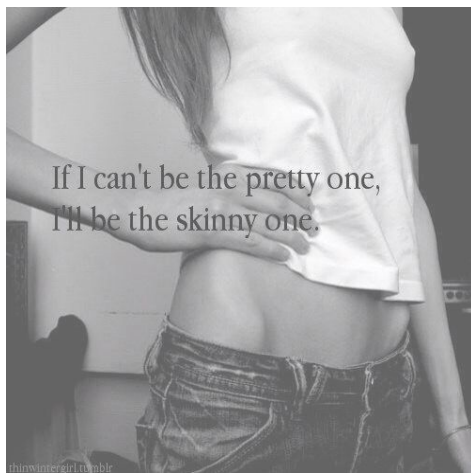
images and revealed how much she was paid to wear a dress or a crop top, or how many pictures she really took to get the effortless image in a bikini.

Following this 'outing' on Instagram O'Neill produced a website called www.letsbegamechangers.com. She posted eight videos to the website with ironic titles such as *Make up makes me feel better* and *I'll be happy when I'm skinny*. In these videos she revealed how these images worked to manipulate young women who liked her images into believing that they were depictions of 'real life'. In *I'll be happy when I'm Skinny* O'Neill states how the image of her lying by a pool in a bikini was the first image that really got her attention before she was 'Facebook famous'. At that time, in her 15 year-old life, she states she had an unhealthy relationship with food had just broken up with her first boyfriend and was insecure and lost. She was scarily thin and was stalking her ex-boyfriend online taking body image inspiration from the girls in his Facebook photos.⁵⁷ O'Neill also presents a hetero-sexy femininity through "the codes of stereotypical heterosexual desirability; the symbols, fashions, poses, and behaviours invested with normative 'sex-appeal' in recent popular culture"(Dobson, 2010, p.46). Dobson states that hetero-sexy is a more useful term than 'sexualised' as it is one "which does not necessarily imply a clear sense of either agentic choice or lack thereof." O'Neill demonstrates this agency and lack thereof in how she explains her images where she was both a producer and a consumer of this 'lifestyle'. In this way O'Neill uses body image, clothing and text to highlight her place as feminine and commodifiable. This is similar to Skeggs' definitions of respectability being a mark of femininity; O'Neill constructs her body and surrounds herself in visual markers that are symptomatic of postfeminist sensibilities.

O'Neill's hyper-femininity and her self-commodification led to her Internet success. She had around half a million followers and was a poster girl for #fitspo, a hash tag dedicated to images of fit-inspiration, deriving from the term thinspo a popular term on pro-anorexia websites. Pro-anorexia or pro-ana websites have been circulating the Internet since the late 1990s, on these websites 'inspirational'

⁵⁷ Here White's use of the lesbian gaze is useful. O'Neill looks at other women to shape her own body, however this also crosses over with Doane's female gaze where O'Neill looks from the position of a man. Her gaze also exemplifies Cooley's (1901) conception of the "looking glass self" where the gaze refers to "the generalized other"(Wensch, 2009). O'Neill shapes her body based on multiple gazes.

images of extremely thin people are shared, food and weight are seen as enemies, and eating disorders are seen as choices rather than illnesses⁵⁸. With the rise in social media these communities are now found on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Flickr. The popular hash tags such as #thinspo and #fitspo are common on Pinterest and tumblr pages where women (and men) post images and memes (motivational text over images) as a means to 'inspire' others to keep going in their aims of the perfect body.



Figures 41 & 42. *Thinspiration* memes from Pinterest.com.

Although I am not measuring effect in my research or claim that the effects of these images are harmful, or that 'all women' believe what they see on these sites, in the case of Essena O'Neill, we can see through her high number of followers and likes on Instagram that this image of postfeminist femininity is popular online, and one that is created in a similar way to advertising. O'Neill stated in her video *You're my inspiration* how she pinned images of women with toned bodies and thigh gaps, screenshot them and made folders on her phone or print them and put them on a pin board in her room, also printing these motivational quotes like 'love yourself' which meant looking like "these girls". O'Neill admitted to starving herself or eating small meals to get skinny, where skipping meals was seen as

⁵⁸ (<http://www.anad.org/get-information/eating-disorders-and-the-internet/>).

'strong' (O'Neill, 2016). Michele White describes how this type of female gazing could be seen as the lesbian gaze, quoting Diana Fuss's argument that "women must look as lesbians" (Fuss, in White, 2015, p.109). This type of gazing and admiring of other women's bodies could be considered through the lesbian gaze; however, this gazing affects the looker's body in a way that she shapes it accordingly. Ultimately these bodies, although admired by each other, are shaped to fit in to consumerist notions of white feminine beauty. In the previous chapter I quoted Jessie Daniels who described the practices of body transformation in pro-ana sites and trans blogs as resistance to gender stereotyping and a refusal to become disembodied through online interaction, as cyberfeminists would like to claim. Through interactions with images the bodies 'become'⁵⁹, however the changes made to O'Neill's body cause her body to become a more commodifiable version of herself. This interaction does not exemplify a cyborg subjectivity, although engaging in bodily enhancement it is tied to notions of femininity. In this sense O'Neill's body transformation is a product of her self-brand and not an act of subversion but one of compliance to industry standard beauty.

The focus on reality and fiction within these performances is important to this research. In the artworks in the following chapters I will discuss the use of what Rebecca Schneider (1998) states through Walter Benjamin's (1973, p171) "dialectic image" or 'showing the show' as a prominent feature (p.24). The need to expose authenticity in the online female subject proving that they are not works of fiction is an important way to connect with viewers. Indeed on O'Neill's website created after her 'coming out' she used her game changing lifestyle to sell a different way to 'be'. The website contained lists of inspiring TED talks on self esteem, feminism and documentaries on veganism, the environment and exploitation in the clothing industry.

Like in the #nomakeupselfie trend, in O'Neill's new 'game changing' video she states that in the week she quit Instagram and set up her new website she had barely slept and not washed, even though she has acne- she simply 'doesn't care'.

⁵⁹ Rebecca Coleman has done extensive research into teenage girls relationships with images. Challenging the 'media effects model' Coleman states that "Both photographic images and media images involve the capture of a body as a particular spatial and temporal moment and produce specific possibilities of becoming; both photographic and media images produce knowledges, understandings, and experiences of bodies through which these bodies become" (Coleman, 2008, p175).

O'Neill's lack of self-care displays anti-feminine behaviour and behaves similar to the #nomakeupselfie. Her lack of respectability (Skeggs, 1997) shows her rejection of femininity. O'Neill sees herself as liberating the image-conscious young women social media users. In O'Neill's video she states that she is anti-YouTube channels that run on adverts or are funded by followers, she is not making content for anyone but herself but she is also planning on making three videos a week to post on her website. So whilst she is not interested in followers, likes or views, she is still creating content and posting it online, which she terms to be more 'real' as it is from the heart and not for financial gain. O'Neill was in what McRobbie describes as a postfeminist double entanglement; while she was promoting body positivity and feminist ideologies her manifesto was still set in the image/lifestyle/positivity realm that is a huge part of hyper-feminine bloggers.

However, the backlash O'Neill received from fellow vloggers and the community she was once part of came as a shock to her. She never realised that through her honesty and confessions she would actually offend the people who work in the same industry. When O'Neill set up her website, she was then accused of shifting her loyalties to a different cause but still basing her success on the viewers and clickers of this new venture. This shut O'Neill down completely, she realised that after her attempts to uncover the truth behind the fakeness of social media she was making a lot of enemies and even received death threats. In early 2016 O'Neill sent an email to her many followers explaining exactly what had happened and how being an "idle"(sic) made her delusional as to what was reality, she had dumped her old friends for her new LA friends, and her encounters in LA with celebrities and how they use social media were all so artificial "hence the book" that she is about to write, which will reveal many of her experiences (O'Neill). Referring to this life as "2D" O'Neill has now returned to "3D" life and is getting a job in a pub so she can focus on her writing career. In the email it is clear O'Neill had a serious eating disorder, which she refers to as 'body dysmorphia disorder', she became depressed and was a social media addict. Trying to publicly turn her life around led to a deeper problem where the backlash made matters worse than before. O'Neill is careful not to blame the people who work and create

content for the Internet, she criticises the world itself not the people in it. This website has also disappeared after backlash O'Neill received for it.

O'Neill's carefully staged performance on Instagram complied with the regulations that form these types of subjectivities. She performed the perfect self-brand and in this way was celebrated and praised. This performance of respectability within postfeminist 'new femininities' and granted her visibility and popularity online. Once O'Neill rejected these regulations her performance became less respectable and therefore less valid, trying to re-invent herself publicly also backfired. O'Neill had lost the trust of her followers. The perception of authenticity shattered and therefore the trust of her followers went with it. Her failing led to her invisibility, unable to convince her followers of her authenticity.⁶⁰

Moving on, I look at Amalia Ulman's performance of the hyper-feminine, hypersexual female agent of Instagram. Ulman's project demonstrates a type of cyborg subjectivity that O'Neill could never attain. However, I am interested in the success of Ulman's project as an exemplification of a performance where the perception of authenticity is so well constructed, she managed to fool her followers to believing her transformation. Even though the 'like' counts and popularity was particularly low for Instagram images Ulman's project struck a chord with the art world. However, it is a performance young women do everyday on Instagram. Separating Ulman's work from the public outing of O'Neill is in the ironic distance Paasonen describes that must work in order to embody the cyborg. Haraway calls for interruptions to the networks of domination but Ulman's project doesn't so much interrupt as participate in. Can this work be considered cyborgian? And how different is it from O'Neill's in its promotion of body ideals and postfeminist subjectivities.

⁶⁰ Authenticity is used here to describe a type of performance that is as close to the performers 'real life' as possible. As mentioned in Jerslev's (2016) description of Zoella, fame and popularity is achieved through the perception of authenticity.

Amalia Ulman

Inspired by the rich kids of Instagram⁶¹ trend in 2014 artist Amalia Ulman created an alternative lifestyle in a four-month performance called *Excellences and Perfections* on Instagram and Facebook. The work consisted of uploading images accompanied by text captions and hash tags. Ulman, an art school graduate, decided not to tell any of her friends what she was doing in order to keep up the lie. The project came about after Ulman was in a serious bus accident that left her in hospital thousands of miles away from family and friends with only an iPad for company. Ulman states in *Dazed Digital* that she had heard about a woman who went around expensive hotels taking photos of herself and uploading them to Instagram gaining followers through this faked lifestyle- not unlike how Essena O'Neill describes her images above (Ulman, 2015a). Ulman was also inspired by the trend of the rich kids of Instagram, Tumblr and by "Korean girls on Instagram"(Ulman, 2015b). Ulman describes her project as writing a story in pictures in order to manipulate her growing audience. Ulman's project took the form of three chapters, featuring three popular archetypes of young women commonly seen on social media: the cute girl, the sad or lost girl, and the girl-in-recovery. In her first set of images and status updates Ulman's persona characterised the "cute, pink, grunge, LA, indie girl, who has only read JD Salinger", she was based on the "American Apparel model" (Ulman, 2015c). After a week of posting Ulman's popularity grew, she received many emails from male photographers asking to "shoot her" with their "phallic camera lens" and she accepted one unpaid professional shoot, ironically stating that "girls want to get their photo taken for free of course"(ibid).

Ulman also stated that she based her character on the popular celebrity car-crash Amanda Bynes. Bynes is an American teen actress who famously used social media to play out her mental breakdown. Having had numerous DUIs and drugs charges Bynes took to Twitter making claims of her father sexually abusing

⁶¹ On a recent Channel 4 documentary *Cutting Edge: The Rich Kids of Instagram*, we are introduced multimillionaire young adults, some heirs and heiresses, others wealthy from investments or tech careers. Although the scope of the documentary was typically narrow, this 'glimpse' into the lives of famous on Instagram for being rich illustrated the shallowness of such a platform as Instagram, where fame is measured through possessions and expensive lifestyles. The Instagram account 'Rich Kids of Instagram' currently has 364,000 followers (16/01/17).

her then retracting the statements claiming she has bi-polar disease. Bynes is portrayed as a public laughing-stock; her demise and obvious psychological issues are followed by people/trolls online in what Ulman describes as “the sadder the girl the happier the troll”(ibid). Ulman stated that she wanted the audience to feel uncomfortable and to observe her public failure and that through the images posted the public soon created their narrative to Ulman’s online life.



Figure 43. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Perfections*, 2015, Instagram image.

Ulman is a former escort (or so she claims) and uses this experience in the second part of her project her character: *The Crazy Bitch*. She breaks up with her high school sweetheart and hits a low, where she is then immersed in a world of drugs, extreme beauty, and acquires a sugar daddy. In this incarnation Ulman’s sugar daddy pays for her to get a boob job, the ultimate form of female beauty. Body work such as this is considered a self-investment or ‘doing it for yourself’, not one that is “over determined by a larger patriarchal structure that makes cosmetic treatment seem the only option for psychological survival in a world hostile to women’s bodies”(Ulman, 2014). Ulman refers to the cosmetic gaze as one that is hard to get away from. Anne Balsamo refers to the “cosmetic surgeon’s gaze” that creates “assembly-line beauty” stating that “difference” is made over into sameness (Balsamo, 1996, p.58). This self-control over the body via a social mediated gaze provides women (and men to a degree) with a sense of control over their self-image, however the body on offer from the cosmetic surgeon is limited and really only offers one type of body, that of a westernised notion of “natural” beauty (ibid, p.79).

To highlight this cosmetic surgeon's gaze even more explicitly in Ulman's work, the only public event the artist took part in during this four month project was a talk with plastic surgeon and famous art collector Dr Fredric Brandt. This event happened after Ulman had a nose and cheek procedure performed by the surgeon, this was done in an effort to make her fake boob job and new lifestyle more credible to her online followers. Ulman's downfall into drugs and body issues mirror many 'real life' stories posted online, she claims that in her Facebook diary of her boob job she acquired content from similar diaries posted on www.realself.com where "painful experiences are infantilised between LOLs⁶²" (Ulman, 2015c). This expression of the postfeminist woman, illustrates the 'new femininities' described by Dobson as both "hyper-feminine and laddish...as exaggeratedly feminine in aesthetics and bodily traits, and as tough, assertive, brazen, and in many way 'anti-feminine' in attitude" (Dobson, 2010, p.47). Ulman's respectability here is illustrated in her agency. Using her right as a woman to do whatever she wants do her body displays empowerment, a trait of the postfeminist masquerade. Also in the posts of her new boob job Ulman uses hash tags such as #frankenboob, which is popular on the www.realself.com website diaries. In *Producing Women* (2015) Michele White discusses the use of the term 'frankenening' amongst the nail polish blogging community, in the Frankenstein bride in the Trash The Dress trend of post-wedding photo shoots and the female reborn artists-who like Dr. Frankenstein create life-like newborn dolls and sell them online. White uses the term as an example of how it undermines "the usual cultural associations of scientists and inventors with men" (White, 2015, p.174). White relates the rendering of the body in pieces as the nail blogger does through images of her disembodied hands with "Roland Barthes's indication that individuals can never see the whole self without mediation" (White, 2015, p.194). Ulman crops the body in the image to disguise the fact that it is not an image of her body. These images are common online in before and after shots where images are posted of certain body parts and not the full body.⁶³

⁶² 'LOL' is an abbreviation of 'Laugh Out Loud'.

⁶³ Cropping images of women's bodies is linked to commodity fetishism in advertising. Gillian Dyer describes women's bodies being cropped and fragmented as "moulded in the form that men desire" (Dyer, 1982, p.98).



Figure 44. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Perfections*, 2015, Instagram image.

The Transformation Treats from 'Sugar Daddy'

Ulman's disembodied photos on Instagram taken from the website www.realself.com and used as her own, illustrate the monstrous body. However the #frankenboob does differ from the frankener of the nail polish site or 'producing woman', in that the frankener in Ulman's images is still the plastic surgeon, the image of the nail artist is her own and completely self-produced. Ulman's new breasts are also funded by her sugar daddy, a modern day Dr. Frankenstein. Ulman is not the creator of her own image, she is moulding her body to notions of the perfect body produced through the male gaze and the cosmetic surgeon's gaze and validated by the online gaze of her followers. Ulman's character represents the production of Braidotti's post-human simulator described as "immensely rich" commodified producers of capital. Capital in postmodern times according to Braidotti "harps on and trades in body fluids: the cheap sweat and blood of the disposable workforce throughout the third world; but also, the wetness of desire of first world consumers as they commodify their existence into over-saturated stupor." Ulman's persona is drenched in desire of the "first world consumer" (Braidotti, 1996, p.3).



Figure 45. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Perfections*, 2015, Instagram image.

The Apology

In the third and final incarnation of her character Ulman played the girl in recovery, she had overcome drugs, a stint of escorting, body modification and was out the other end. Ulman took two weeks off social media to make the rehab stint more believable and following this she published an apology to her followers on Facebook, her apology got 240 likes on Facebook. This final stage of her lifecycle was inspired by the trends started by celebrities and lifestyle bloggers like Gwyneth Paltrow. Images were full of smoothies, yoga and healthy living, posting an image hugging a random baby stating it was her cousin; she also got a new boyfriend (Ulman, 2015). Her character had gone from the high-life to the depths of despair and came out the other end, rehabilitated with healthy lifestyle, and a new man to share it with. The different forms of attention these images received illustrate how the networks and users on them mould images of female subjectivity in to behaving within the codes of respectability. These codes reward the happy woman who is beautiful, healthy, has a man and a family around her.

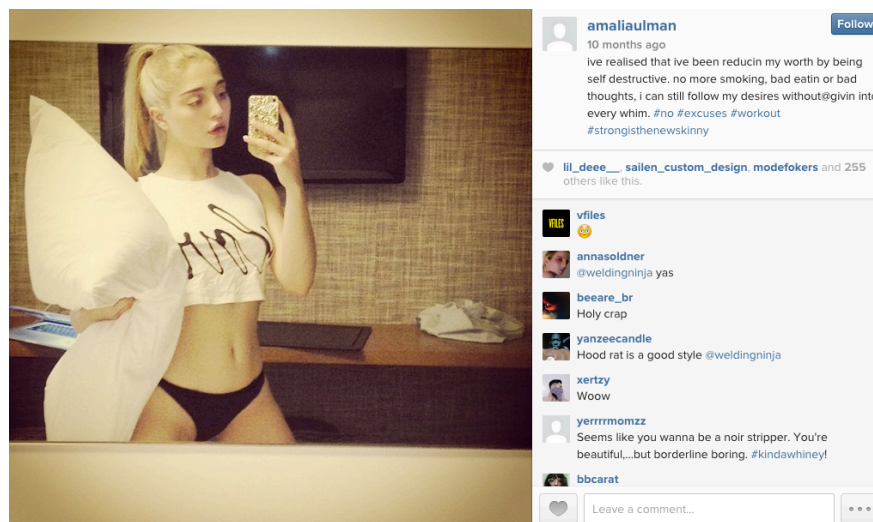


Figure 46. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Perfections*, 2015, Instagram image.

The Reformation

When Ulman started this project on her Instagram without telling her peers, the gallery she worked for had told her she was sabotaging her career, but Ulman kept up the ruse. It seems it didn't take much for people around her to start believing her posts, showing the power these images can have. To her surprise, rather than receiving messages of concern Ulman received emails from fellow artists asking her about her plastic surgery procedure, not only did they believe her but also they were interested in getting it done.

Ulman doesn't like to call the project a piece of art, she was in the process of destroying her online persona so rather she saw it more as an experiment. The character she performed was a heightened version of herself and her online image, which she says she wanted to destroy as she found herself becoming too involved in the value of the image. One thing that Ulman was surprised by in the project was the lack of concern by her followers when she was clearly caught up in sex work, plastic surgery and unstable relationships. The idea of the car crash, fallen girl online which can be seen in the public head shaving of Britney Spears or the drunk driving arrests of Lindsay Lohan. There is something about a failing woman who is in the public eye, even in the small capacity Ulman was, that creates a good story. Ulman says that it was only when she made a public apology on her

Instagram that people contacted her. She hadn't heard from the people who contacted her in years and through their contact she realised they had been following the story all along, however they only came in contact after she had 'fixed' herself. She states that through the high number of likes for her apology her behaviour was validated.

Although the main focus of this thesis is not about artist's deception or undercover lives, the strategy of performing an alter ego or a persona for a period of time in order to uncover how images of supposed 'real women' are just constructions aligned with consumerist desire is prominent within the case studies I am looking at. As can be seen with Lynn Hershman Leeson's double life as Roberta Breitmore, this practice is not new for artists, but the format of social media makes these practices different in how their deceptions work and the type of femininity or what is deemed feminine has moved on from second wave feminist art practices. As Rosi Braidotti states: "One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically anti-essentialist position" (Braidotti, 1994, p.4). In these works the performance is not necessarily empowering to women, but *in* the performance the artist uncovers and reveals the construction of the subject woman.

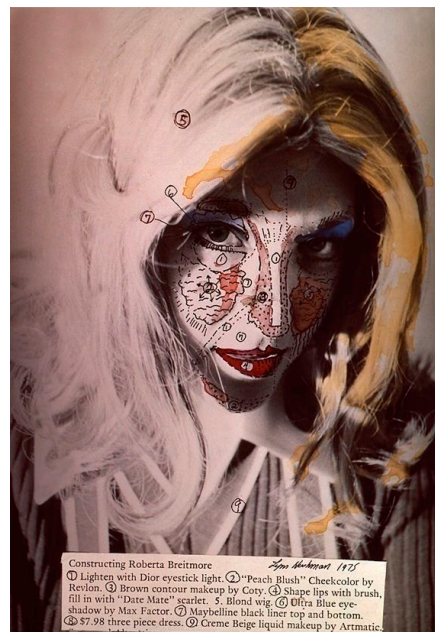


Figure 47. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta's Construction Chart 1*, 1975.
 Archival digital print and dye transfer, 58.4 x 43.2cm.

In a final slide of Ulman's 2014 ICA presentation she puts the quote by queer theorist Beatriz Preciado: "Every Internet portal is modelled on and organised according to this masturbatory logic of pornographic consumption" (Preciado, 2013, p.39). The hyper sexualised teen girl is a self-produced commodity for the Internet, on Instagram one can self-brand in line with popular commodified subjectivities. One can create a fictional lifestyle that thousands will follow and comment on and in Ulman and O'Neill's case- take even more interest in their downfall. Performers gain trust from their followers through the perception of authenticity. However trying to perform authenticity tends to result in conforming to industry standards of female beauty. The interesting results or more the disappointing results from Ulman's experiment is that the popular image of young woman online is extremely narrow and in many cases her popularity increases as she fails in her performing her gender appropriately. Ulman's performance highlights how failure to perform was a lure for her audience. Her followers were not so concerned when she was getting plastic surgery or sleeping with an older man for money, but they came out of the woodwork when Ulman had reformed herself. The support Ulman received from followers only came to light when she returned to respectability, although they were following the story all along.

Going From Instagram to the Gallery

Since Ulman uncovered her Instagram project she has presented it in galleries and art institutions in numerous forms. I have quoted above from a performative presentation Ulman gave at the opening of the exhibition *The Future of Memory* at Kunsthalle Wien in Vienna, Austria in 2015 and a talk at the ICA in 2014. In the performance at Vienna, Ulman stands in front of a screen playing a screen recording of scrolling images from her project. In her 10 minute presentation Ulman stands with a manuscript and reads through a kind of stream of consciousness text she has prepared. In the text Ulman addresses the commodification and self-branding of one's image. How we can use money to market and manipulate the body and the self-image, how "neo-liberalism requires hard core liquidity" (Ulman, 2015). Her sentences melt into one another... "An emotional dictatorship, a dictatorship of tears... A system of likes and trolls...new

sincerity because in a networked world the question of authenticity can no longer be posed- pose posing post-authentic...crying is pointless if you can't be seen crying so it didn't happen". This form of presenting the research backs up Ulman's point that the project was never intended as an artwork but as a social experiment. As we can see from above the experiment surprised Ulman herself. The ability to convince her online followers of this lie was easier than she imagined and the reactions she received were shocking in their lack of public concern on her failure and breakdown and the surfacing of people in praise of her recovery at the end. This work has become extremely popular, and gained massive attention in 2016 showing in many major exhibitions and galleries. I saw a section of the work at the Whitechapel exhibition *Electronic Superhighway* in 2016 it featured two prints from Ulman's Instagram images hung on the wall. The images themselves are underwhelming in that they look like many other Instagram images of young women and I suppose that was Ulman's point. I think the project in itself is almost un-representable except as documentation, which raises questions about the temporality of the work and social media practices in general. Much in the same way Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Roberta Breitmore* work consists of artefacts and documents of an identity, the images of *Excellences and Perfections* act as documentation. In terms of performativity and Butler's notion of subversive drag, Ulman's work only achieves subversion as a piece of documentation. Her compliance with Instagram regulations only adds to the plethora of similar images on the platform. Ulman does not interrupt the network as Haraway's cyborg encourages, but she does uncover some workings and the events resulting from the project open up space for these revelations to be discussed.



Figure 48. Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Performances* at Whitechapel gallery, 2016.

In the *Performing for the Camera* exhibition at Tate Modern in 2016, although I didn't get to attend the show, it seems the installation may have been more successful, allowing viewers to scroll through iPads and explore the full extent of Ulman's project. This form of presentation places the viewer in a closer position to the work, enabling them to view all of the comments and the extent of the piece. Of course if the viewer is interested in those things the work is still on Instagram and easy to view. The work is a story, an archive of an event, although it still exists and followers are still able to comment and like. However the game is completely different now that her performance has been revealed. It changes the images completely- the performance of femininity was much more interesting to followers before the illusion of authenticity was blown, however the audience was different. And this is Ulman's point; these performances on Instagram are taken as 'real' and authentic although they are faked. There is a level of reality and authenticity people want to see when it comes to 'real women', as long as they perform within the acceptable realms of female gender performances they are ok, step out of that and failure provokes invisibility as in the case of O'Neill.

Conclusion

In Erving Goffman's book *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1956) he poses the theory that as in theatre how we perform our identity is constructed by a front stage and a back stage. The front stage is where we perform a version of our self to suit specific roles and situations and where we perform "idealised" versions of our self and the back stage is where "we do much of the real work necessary to keep up appearances" (Hogan, 2010, p.379). Bernie Hogan uses Goffman's theories to explore the performance of the self on social media and the various conditions that can change the performance such as whether the interaction is in real time, like chatting on a blog or live commentary or if the interactions happen after the performance of the self has happened, such as commenting on or viewing a picture someone posted weeks ago. She also states that the notion of the backstage on social media fails to recognise the third party at play in the curation of digital identity and that is the moderators employed by the social media companies. In the case of Facebook's policy where friends of friends can see content one uploads indicates that there is a third party selecting what content goes onto whose feed. Similarly, the case of Instagram's moderating acceptable images highlights the fact that our curated images and their reach are not just dictated by where we upload them, or what tags we apply to them but that Instagram will remove images it deems unacceptable. The regulation on the visibility of inappropriate bodies on Instagram and the performance of 'new femininities' and the attention they attract offer an understanding as to how the bodies of young women are received and perceived and regulated online.

This chapter began by looking at definitions of the postfeminist subject that performs on social media. Following Rosalind Gill's proposal to use postfeminism as an object of critical analysis, I explored performances of femininity online that fit into what Gill calls a "postfeminist sensibility". This chapter attempted to unpack many of the postfeminist double entanglements (McRobbie, 2009), involved in performing the self on social media. One of the main concerns within these performances is the perception of authenticity and how authenticity works as a marker for attaining popularity on social media. I used examples of social media performances by women that pertain to be displaying agency and control. My

analysis of #nomakeupselfie trend exhibited how anti-feminine behaviour such as not wearing make up simply perpetuated a norm that women all wear make up and that by removing it they were somehow sacrificing something important. Makeover and shopping haul videos display how consumerism drives the production of postfeminist vloggers, where perceptions of authenticity guarantee a fanbase and consumers.

The revealing of inauthenticity in the performances by Amalia Ulman and Essena O'Neill were received in polar ways. Ulman's project has been called an "Instagram Masterpiece" (Sooke, 2016), whereas O'Neill has had to remove herself from the Internet completely. These similar performances of so-called authenticity revealed how fans react when the perception of authenticity is uncovered. The level of abuse O'Neill received after her reveal turned sour and forced her to go offline completely.

Ulman states that authenticity is impossible on social media, that we are post-authenticity, but what these projects uncover is that authenticity is actually decided on by spectators and followers based on a type of gender performance that abides by certain rules of appropriateness. This even extends to Ulman's plastic surgery performances, which were so accepted by her followers as if it were a normal activity for a young woman to partake in. It seems to be that the perception of authenticity, as stated in how Zoella retains her popularity, is key to the growth of a self-brand. The problem that this raises is that Zoella is the perfect neo-liberal subject. Her performance of the teenage girl/ young adult is so aligned with consumerist levels of appropriateness that she is untouchable. Performing authenticity in this case actually equates to performing appropriate types of female gender and not stepping outside of those boundaries.

Braidotti (2003) tells us that in order to become the subject woman in our own words we must find our point of repression and work through it. Halberstam (2011) states that rather than revisiting identity categories such as male and female we must engage in unbecoming and avoid any re-essentialising. These theories are based in performing subjectivity, whether it is re-dressing notions of the subject woman or removing the self from categorisation altogether. In my personal experience I struggle with performing a subjectivity that is appropriate to the

perception of what I should be. I partake in many beauty rituals such as wearing makeup or dying my hair however I fail at attaining an image that makes me visible online and in the everyday. Morally I am conflicted, as I disagree with the subjugation of women based on appearance however through my everyday life I am more visible if I take part. I myself am caught in a double entanglement and this is what has led me to this project and the production of these works. Through performing the subject as explicitly as I do in my works with SweetHeart I attempt to uncover the point of my subjugation as a way of working through it and getting passed these moral dilemmas. In an attempt to perform a postfeminist subject I created SweetHeart. This alter ego was performed on many social media sites through the creation of selfie videos and images. In a detailed account of the SweetHeart works in Appendix A & in Chapter Six I explain how the subject didn't always gain attention, especially on Instagram. However I found that live streaming was a way to get instant responses to the performances. SweetHeart did not gain a fanbase on social media, but by wearing clothing that Amy Shields Dobson described as "hetero-sexy" the titles of the works and the comments she received uncovered how this language is not actually creating positive responses to the so-called empowered female performer.

These temporal, contextual and spectatorial conditions of performing female subjectivity on social media must all be taken into account when we analyse works such as Ulman's. This chapter explored the subject of postfeminist masquerade and the contradictions involved in performing agency, empowerment and authenticity on social media. Moving forward I focus specifically on art practices and examine strategies of performing through social media as a form of feminist intervention. Looking at how works are created online, where they are created and how they are presented in gallery situations is vital to understanding modes of subversion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Looking Beyond 'Common Knowledge': Artists Embodying 'New Femininities'

Lurking beneath the surface (of what I would call the post-feminist masquerade) is the proximity of monstrosity, the mask so easily slips, and the side of perfection (total failure) is always within sight, this provides the kind of crack or rupture which Braidotti would take as an opening for transformation (Braidotti, 2000)" (McRobbie, 2009, p.161).

Teen girls are one of the biggest creators of culture: We spend money that makes people popular, rich and famous. Simon Cowell's empire is built on the backs of teenage girls! (Hill, 2015).

All signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat: 'agency,' then is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition (Butler 1999 (1990), p.145).

In Chapter Three I discussed the production of postfeminist 'new femininities' through a number of different types of female gender performance on social media. The makeover vlogger and the popular trend of the #nomakeupselfie, the naive and candid reveal of Essena O'Neill an Instagram microcelebrity coming clean about her brand-driven image deception and the gender performance of Amalia Ulman the undercover artist who consciously 'duped' her Instagram followers into her 'fake' life performing of popular 'girl' tropes. The practices focused on regulating the bodies of young women and how some bodies are deemed more 'appropriate' than other on social media. These practices also

worked to reaffirm the norms of feminine beauty as young, thin, white and pretty. Perceptions of authenticity dominate the success of microcelebrities. In the examples I looked at how authenticity is achieved in conforming to postfeminist codes of femininity and femaleness where young women use their agency and freedom of choice to perform their subjectivity online. These performances were looked at as examples of gender performativity, where the repetition of gendered norms reinforced stereotypical gender binaries. In terms of postfeminist subjectivities there is a sense that having body autonomy enables young women to present their bodies online as they like, however external forces such as Instagram regulations or social pressure continue to keep women's bodies under surveillance. Using theories of cyborg subjectivities as those that interrupt networks and rupture viewing positions I considered how works by artists online attempt to challenge accepted and dominant codes of female 'appropriateness', however these practices also face commodification by the networks and risk exacerbating the issue rather than challenge it.

In a talk Amalia Ulman gave at the ICA she discussed how the character she played in her Instagram project was definitely a girl, that in the media 'the girl' never gets old she just get replaced. Ulman was 25 when she created the project, her images and her body represented 'girl' subjectivity and Ulman passed as 'girl'. Here the discussion about authenticity and agency within the tropes of female gender performativity online focus on art practices that deal with the 'girl' trope. This chapter focuses on contemporary art practices through two different lenses, one: in the subjectivity and identity the artists use, in this case the girl or teen girl, and two: the practical or formal construction of the artwork as form of intervention online and in the gallery. These are the two main areas of concern within my practice, the construction of the subject (young woman online) and the construction of experiencing the subject (installation). It is my argument that in order for these works to be subversive they must affect the spectator, therefore the conditions of viewing the work is integral to its subversive affect. Cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch's research into YouTube vloggers describes a 'context collapse' in terms of how the presentation of the self on these platforms is experienced in unknown

situations to the producer. Therefore the creation of the work is not made for anyone but for everyone. Wesch states: "The familiar walls that help limit and define the context are gone. The vlogger must address anybody, everybody, and maybe even nobody all at once" (Wesch, 2009, p.23). In the works discussed in this chapter the artists perform specific subjectivities to invisible online audiences. Yet the subjects they mimic are part of a wider demographic of young women defining their individual subjectivities through their relationships with online audiences. In these collapsed contexts it impossible to measure the impact the videos produced by young women online have. The works produced here attempt to make sense of these collapsed contexts by giving the performances new contexts through the creation of public artworks and performing the subjects through the artists own bodies.

In her politics of parody Rosi Braidotti uses "the philosophy as if" to describe a feminist politics of parody where women do not disavow fetishistic representation but affirm a subject that is not grounded in the idea of feminine nature and capable of moral and ethic agency (Braidotti, 1996, p.4). The works discussed in this chapter engage in a variety of parodic and representational practices that work to affirm the subject they are performing by complicating assumptions of female subjectivity. The works discussed here all focus on teen-girl subjectivities and are all performed by adult women. This type of 'adolescent drag' (Watkins Fischer, 2012) comments on assumptions of the teen girl and how re-performing postfeminist sensibilities the artists are challenging how they are regulated and monitored online. Watkins Fischer states:

The performance of adolescence is decidedly not a further proliferation of postfeminism, a form of antifeminism that has itself co-opted adolescent tropes these artists seek actively to reclaim. Adolescent drag is rather a younger generation of women artists' tactical negotiation with their cultural inheritance from 1960s and '70s feminist art and

from second-wave feminism more broadly (Watkins Fischer, 2012, p.50).

The works discussed here are looked at as feminist artworks that are performing within postfeminist structures. Using adolescent drag as a temporal subjectivity and as a form exploring the multiplicity of female subjectivity that gets lost or is under-represented online. I look at these works through the artist's descriptions of their work in published interviews and through my experience of the works as online pieces and documentation provided by the artists. One of the questions posed in this chapter is how effective are these cyborg subjectivities in their disavowal and affirmation of subjects that transcend how the bodies of young women are perceived and regulated in digital everyday environments? And, how do these artists combine traditional methods of art presentation (galleries, on-street performance and live theatre venues) with subversive online performances to create new contexts of spectatorship. These works are looked at not only in how they interrupt the network but how they challenge the physical spectator also. There is a focus on irony and how these works use irony as a form of subversion. In performing works in spaces where contexts are collapsed (Wesch, 2009, p.23) artists must explore strategies of controlling the experience of these subjectivities.

Girl Power Feminism

In her 2009 book *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela McRobbie describes postfeminist femininity as the 'post-feminist masquerade', the figuration of the 'working girl', the 'phallic girl', and, the 'global girl' (McRobbie, 2009, p.7). McRobbie describes post-feminist masquerade as "an intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality"(ibid p.60). Rosi Braidotti's (2006a) 'virtual feminine', which is a type of "becoming-woman" suggests women should reclaim the subject position of Woman through transformation and subversion. For McRobbie, "post-feminist masquerade" is a capitalist ideal that is provided to young women as way to

market individuality and choice whilst at the same time keeping women in a subordinate position or always watching them selves. Braidotti's feminist affirmation rallies women to use their subjectivity in new ways to change the notion of woman altogether. These ideas also cross over with Judith Butler's theories on drag as a subversive practice that exposes the construction of gender. Butler states that 'girling' or naming of the girl "is transitive" and that "its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm", however she must "cite the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject"(Butler, 1993, p.232). This idea of a 'norm' that governs the subjectivity of the young woman then sets out expectations of behaviour that is appropriate to that norm, this tends to be accentuated on social media. The naming of the subject girl and the expectations associated with such a label are challenged by the artists in this chapter.



Figure 49. Miley Cyrus, *Wrecking Ball*, 2013.
Video still.



Figure 50. Miley Cyrus, *Jolene* performance at The Backyard Sessions, 2012.
Video still.

As I write this I experienced this normative expectation with a post of Miley Cyrus that came up on my Facebook feed. A male friend posted a video of Cyrus performing Dolly Parton's *Jolene*, dressed 'respectably' in an ankle length skirt and equally respectable top, another (male) friend left a comment stating, "She should keep her pants on and do more of this". This refers to Cyrus's reputation for wearing very little in public or her hypersexual videos where she appears to be naked. This behaviour is seen as unfeminine and inappropriate, by keeping her pants on she would fit more into an acceptable 'norm'. Debra Ferraday encourages readers to consider acts such as Cyrus's naked twerking "not as an attempt to shock or to appropriate marginal experience, but as a performance that attempts to make sense of the affective politics of artifice", these performances then do not fall under a broad umbrella of 'subversive' but should be read as queer, as "femininity is always already queer" (Ferraday, 2014, p.150). Cyrus's career started at Disney where her character Hannah Montana was an icon for millions of tween⁶⁴ girls and as she has grown out of this good girl mould the reception has been highly critical. It is thinking through these ideas of 'norms' associated with young women and how their 'unruly' behaviour ruptures notions of female subjectivity that the practices here focus on. This notion of 'respectability', looked at in chapter three, is described by Beverley Skeggs as a marker of class. By choosing to be 'respectable' women are accepted by the middle classes and in this way are made visible.

Postfeminist theories were discussed in chapter three through Gill & Scharff's definition of postfeminism as a sensibility. I find it useful to use postfeminism as "an object of critical analysis" (Gill & Scharff, 2011) to describe the complicated relationships women have with subjectivity on social media. Specifically within the Western societies of the UK and North America it is difficult to avoid some kind of online presence and representation, it is even harder to

⁶⁴ Tween is a word used to describe a pre-teen girl.

challenge the norms created within social media culture without somehow taking part in it. Here I consider the girlification of women online and within third wave feminism to seek out instances of resistance to norms within feminist art practices. Using Gill's postfeminist sensibilities as an 'object of critical analysis' is useful to describe the overarching tropes that are played out by many young women online. These tropes, although challenged many by women users, are regulated and enforced by moderators and commercial brands on social networks, these networks being what Teresa DeLauretis (1989) describes as 'technologies of gender'. Where the technology itself inscribes gendered assumptions.

The girlification of female subjectivity on social media takes its place within 'girlie feminism', a third wave feminist term associated with authors Jennifer Baumgardener and Amy Richards who in their 2000 book *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, call "girlie" "the intersection of feminism with feminine culture", stating:

Girlie says we're not broken, that our desires aren't simply booby traps set by the patriarchy. Girlie encompasses the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation—Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels—and says using them isn't shorthand for 'we've been duped.' Using makeup isn't a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, p.136).

Third wave feminism, like cyberfeminism and indeed all manifestations of feminism, has multiple definitions such as: it is situated with a generation "whose birth dates fall between 1963 and 1974" (Drake & Haywood, 1997, p.4), or it is a break away from the "single-minded focus on organisation and activism...than by the study of identity-formation, leading women to theorize and practice individual feminist politics expressed more subtly in everyday-life actions and popular

media”(Edelson, 2007). Third wave feminism is seen as a more inclusive and liberal wave of feminism where issues such as intersectionality, sexuality, body autonomy, LGBT and individual rights in line with neoliberal society and media representation are challenged. There are many similarities between what is defined as third wave and postfeminist, where there is an attitude of ‘the battles being won’ or that women are able to act and present themselves freely without judgement. I am not so much arguing against these notions, as being born in 1986 and growing up at a time of ‘girl power’, I too was of the postfeminist/girl power persuasion, even if I knew and felt the effects of my position as a young woman not fully ‘in control’ of my body and my self image. My own perception of feminism was something that I did not need; associating it with heavy politics and issues that were not relevant to me; I was the perfect neo-liberal subject in a time of “distance from feminism” (McRobbie in Harris, 2004, p.6). However, the more I focused on my art practice as something that was deeply feminist in the issues it raised on the representation of women in the media the more I saw how the work stemmed from my insecurities as a woman and how they were affected by the world around me. Third wave feminism encouraged young women to be political about sexual freedom and individuality and has been associated with activist groups like Riot Grrrl. The hyper-sexual liberty of third wave feminism has resulted in an anything goes situation and a “paradigm shift”, where the categorisation of female subjectivity has become complicated and for example: women and girls are both girlified in the wearing of hello kitty merch by adult women and the wearing of midriff tops by young girls (Harris, 2004, xx intro.).

Sarah Banet-Wiser explains how the tension between second and third wave feminism typically understood as ‘generational’ is insufficient. Banet-Wiser claims it may actually be more inline with Lisa Hogeland’s point that this insufficient reason for their differences may lie in the problems within feminism and the “fundamental differences in our visions of feminism’s tasks and accomplishments”(Banet-Wiser, 2004, p.122). One of these differences being media visibility, where third wavers see consumer culture as a place of

empowerment second wavers see it as misogynistic consumer culture (Banet-Wiser, 2004, p.122). Comparing second wave to third wave is not a productive activity according to Banet-Wiser, the tensions and contradictions involved in the visual media consumer-friendly third wave are different and by performing girl power within these structures does not negate a feminist agenda. Recognising that associating girls with the term "power" is a complex move and one where power is directly connected to consumerist agendas. As seen in the opening quote, young women are aware of their 'power' as consumers, many do not feel 'duped' and further to that many young women engage in the consumer markets as DIY producers. Through taking part in this economy of subjectivity, young women as producers can work to create alternative understandings of female subjectivity online.

Debates over 'feminisms' and the relevance of postfeminist thought between feminist academics lies in a similar position to my above attempt at untangling or explaining feminist positions within social media culture. Retallack, et al., (2016) challenge claims that feminism is in its aftermath and that young women on social media are in an era of postfeminism. They look at how a group of fourth wave feminists operate online in opposing their "distinctly neo-liberalized and marketized school environment where bodily regulation, perfection and sell-ability reign supreme"(Retallack, et al., 2016, p.1). They use theories of networked affect to explore how these online activities affect their lives in an intra-active relationship. The practices I focus on in my case studies are seen as examples of fourth wave feminist art. Fourth wave feminism is described as:

Characterised by its emergence in online dialogue and connection as information technologies are used for organising networks that bring feminism to prominence (Munro, 2013). Feminists are increasingly turning to social media sites to make visible marginalised voices and bodies, and the vast expanse of the Internet has opened up significant spaces for discourse and resistance of

hegemonic notions of femininity (Eisenhauer, 2004; Jowett, 2004 cited in Retallack et al. 2016).

Retallack et al. (2016) also describe how this feminism has been termed "slacktivism" in how online activity is an easy way out of direct, on the street activism. However in their research they discover a group of young feminists who use social networking to activate their physical activism and take part in an on-street protest against body shaming in advertising. This activated relationship between online and on-street as an example of Paasonen et al. (2015) suggestion that theories of networked affect can help us to see "how individual, collective, discursive and networked bodies both human and machine... are modified by one another"(p.13). Also described by Retallack et al. as: "'digital-material-sensory-affective-spatial assemblage' in which experiences of sexism and activist events become 'part of the whole affective sensorium' that connects those dealing with sexism" (2016, p.17).

I am not making claims here to analyse the everyday practices of individual girls online, but specifically the practices of women artists addressing how subjectivities are performed on social media in-line with postfeminist sensibilities, where youth and girlie femininity are the largest commodities and types of female subjects on social media. Social media is a space where teen girls are most visible and also most highly criticised. Here I will look at the performance of this subject through a number of feminist art practices. Most of these artists are older than teen-girls, however their temporal use of adolescent drag comments on the construction of such subjectivities. In the age of the social media the teen-girl has become a highly fetishised and highly commodified subject and negotiating the boundaries of these representation structures is complicated territory for girls themselves. The practices in this chapter work to uncover how teen-girl subjectivities become commodified and attempt to expose structures that command 'appropriate' forms of postfeminist female subjectivity.

Who or What is the 'Girl'?

In 1999 French collective Tiqqun published *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* and call the young girl an embodiment of commodity capitalism, her burden is the commodification of her body, even if the young girl is not necessarily *the* young girl, for instance they state: "she could be the pope"(Tiqqun, 1999, i.v). The zine style of writing resembles Riot Grrrl's third wave feminist zines that fought against capitalist systems of control. Tiqqun make prophetic statements like:

The Young-Girl is obviously not a gendered concept (Tiqqun, 1999, p.14).

In reality, the Young-Girl is simply the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to the revolutionary menace. As such, the Young-Girl is a polar figure, orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes (ibid, p.15).

The Young-Girl's beauty is produced. She doesn't mind saying so: "Beauty doesn't fall from the sky," that is, it's the fruit of labor (ibid, p.60).

The format and intention of the book is to use the young-girl as an analogy of the state of western capitalism. The book is produced as a manifesto. However criticism of Tiqqun's manifesto focuses on how the authors treat the young girl as complicit or the perpetrator of her exploitation rather than on the "bunch of rich white men" (Power, 2013) behind the commodification of the spectacle of the young-girl. Nina Power is critical that Tiqqun do not speak *for* the young-girl but "through the categories imposed upon her by a culture that heralds her as the metaphysical apex of civilization while simultaneously denigrating her." Power (2013) and Driscoll (2013), criticise Tiqqun's silencing of young-girls as a denial of the "decades of feminist work on girls and girl culture"(Driscoll, 2013, p.293), that through their generic 'Girl as metaphysical crisis of capitalism' they work to erase

actual girls and in turn echo the many texts of moral panics about girls without actually involving girls in their studies. The art practices here work to deal with the subject of girl as both consumer of culture and the crisis in self-image that can lead to and also the teen girl as producer of culture. Even though Tiqqun's intention with the manifesto may be rhetorical through the use of the young-girl she is once again exploited without a voice and this is the issue critics have.

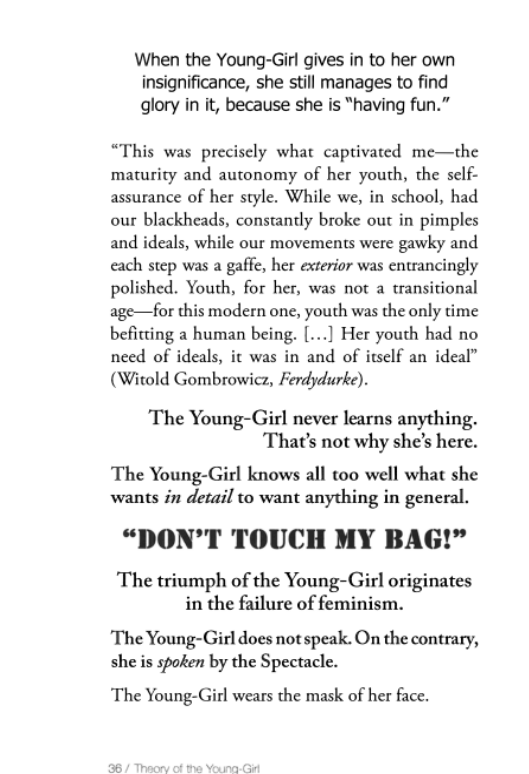


Figure 51. Tiqqun, *Theory of the Young Girl*, example of page in book.

The systems of social networks that I look at in this research have shown that in many ways they are systems that control the performance of femininity. In the regulation of bodies on Instagram, and the sponsorship by massive corporations of Instagram models and YouTube vloggers, it is clear that there are rewards to be made from performing acceptable norms of femininity. In chapter two I introduced Susanna Paasonen's analysis of 'common knowledge' assumptions that are based on gendered stereotypes presented online. Through a textual analysis of websites aimed at women Paasonen describes how common knowledge is used as a general understanding that women are biologically "often tied to issues of corporeality and

reproduction, menstruation, pregnancy and motherhood- not to mention the adjunct categories of relationships, sex and romance, weddings, health and dieting, home decoration, and cooking" (Paasonen, 2005, p.128). This common knowledge reproduces social order where assumptions of gender as simply biology or facts of nature are repeated and "help to whisk women toward Venus and men to Mars" (Paasonen, 2005, pp.169-170). I am interested in the power of common knowledge online where young women repeat these common knowledge stereotypes. These performances centre on the consumption and production of a product, the main product being the woman herself. The question here is: is this participation in consumer culture contributing to the construction of postfeminist gender norms?

The notion of subversiveness seems to be restrictive in a study of gender performativity online, however if we consider the structures of representation within social networks as the forces that young women are fighting against, the performances I am studying are seen as 'subversive'. Ferraday warns how it is unproductive and out of reach to use terms such as subversive and agency as they are so broad, however the parameters of social media provide women with prescribed 'norms' with which they are now attempting to erase and highlight (such as described by Paasonen above). There is also the case that I may be suggesting that the women who perform under what is seen as consumerist femininity are 'dupes' and that the artists who attempt to expose the 'fakeness' within these performances are subversive and more intelligent than the women who 'fall' for consumerist ideology. In defence of this opinion I would state that many of the reasons artists come to produce work about these issues have been personal and come from their own experiences with the construction of female subjectivity. Marsha Meskimmon explores women making art through inter-corporeal and embodied subjectivity, in that "bodies matter, but not as fixed essences- as the very potential of signification in and of the world" (Meskimmon, 2003, p.73). In taking the inter-corporeal relationship of the bodies of the artists and the social platforms they occupy as the place of a certain form of female subjectivity I am

looking for examples of how these relationships could alter perceptions of postfeminist female subjectivity on social media or the problem with rewarding the performance of postfeminist femininity. How each artist in this chapter addresses the treatment of young women online is very different but collectively their practices paint a picture of how women are regulated on social networks and how artists are challenging assumptions of femininity.

In this chapter the practices I discuss use the teen girl masquerade and popular tropes of femininity related to social media as a form of subverting or explicating the subjectivity of the teen girl online. Looking at these works as forms of adolescent drag I question the nature of these works as they expose stereotypes and tropes of femininity as assumed by groups outside of the subjects they are interrogating. I have challenged Tiqqun in their use of the young girl as marker but erasing her voice. The works in this chapter speak for teen-girl subjectivity however they do not speak as the actual subject. I am interested here in how these artists appropriate teen-girl subjectivities as adults, and also how contemporary culture encourages women to associate with youth and innocence as a marker of sexual submissiveness and feminine beauty.

Postfeminist subjectivities are looked at in the “nonjudgmental”⁶⁵ performances of Kate Durbin as she aims to re-perform the tumblr teen girl through her adult body, in Anne Hirsch’s work where she performs a female subjectivity she had not experienced online, and in Louise Orwin’s undercover work on YouTube performing the teen girl online as a form of research for a theatre performance. These practices take on many forms but all are performing as the teen girl in order to create artworks with multiple, intermedial⁶⁶ outputs.

⁶⁵ <http://blog.art21.org/2016/07/12/fame-and-feminism-an-interview-with-kate-durbin/#.V8P2Pz4rly4>

⁶⁶ I have taken Anna Watkins Fischer’s use of Schneider’s take on intermediality in theatre describing the “slippages between and across media, playing with terminology that might belong, properly, to one medium more than another” (Watkins Fisher, 2012). Watkins Fisher describes the engaging with various forms of media simultaneously video and photography, digital media, sculpture, painting, and installation — and in so doing, recalling intermedia and adolescence’s shared status as intermediate forms organized by a logic of “between-ness” (Watkins Fisher, 2012, p.53).

Monica Swindle (2011) states that the question of what is a girl is a loaded one and she uses theories of affect to “conceptualise how girls are constrained in contemporary affect economies but also how girl may affect and be mobilised and circulated to move bodies to make change”(Swindle, 2011). Rather than defining the girl as a known subject confined to one body, Swindle encourages us to look at how ‘girl’ can be an affect that is assumed by those outside of a known category girl, i.e. we can all feel girlie or perform girliness without actually being the constituted subject ‘girl’. By seeing the subject girl as an affective subjectivity it can be used politically and in Sarah Ahmed’s words: “emotions ‘matter’ for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds. So in a way, we do ‘feel our way’”(Ahmed, in Swindle, 2011). Braidotti states “politics...has as much to do with the constitution and organisation of affectivity, memory as it has with consciousness and resistance. The embodied self, sexuality, memory and the imagination are crucial to the making of political subjectivity” (Braidotti, 2000). This construction of the subject can be an embodied activity whereby these artists embody characteristics of the teen girl in order to create affective change. However these affective economies can only work if the teen-girl subjectivity is not reduced to binary codes such as sexual vs. submissive or cute vs. slutty. Appropriating the teen-girl as a political subject faces the problem of failing and reducing the subject to yet further troubling definitions.

As well as looking at the works in terms of *who* the artists are performing, I explore *how* they perform these subjects. The performances here are schizoid and embodied in their nature as they jump from one identity to the next. This is also true in the intermedial nature of the work, being physically present and online at the same time. In each of the works the spectator is made part of the performance. Not necessarily implicit, but the position of the spectator is made visible through the liveness of the works. I am interested in how these performances are executed in public spaces and how physical presence activates these performed subjectivities that are usually performed online. I see these interactions as feminist strategies within new forms of self-representation on social media. However each work is

executed in a different way, meaning levels of online interaction vary and in much of the work the impact is experienced through the live physical audience rather than the online audience.

Kate Durbin

Kate Durbin is an LA based artist, poet and academic. Durbin's multi-disciplinary practice exposes areas of popular culture that are seen as trashy or not serious, such as reality TV shows and The Kardashians. Like Jack Halberstam (*Gaga Feminism* 2013) Durbin has used Lady Gaga in her online journal *Gaga Stigmata* as a cultural reference point in which to explore how performance art can infiltrate popular culture and create new understandings of doing gender. Durbin's practice is based in cultural language and images. As a writer and performer she takes dialogue from popular reality TV shows such as *The Hills* and, in her vocal fry⁶⁷ voice, performs readings of these texts in hyper-real locations such as the self-described 'whimsical' themed Madonna Inn Hotel in LA, which has hundreds of themed rooms. Durbin is drawn to the over the top and gaudy Disney-style landscape of LA.



Figure 52. Kate Durbin, 2014, *Hello Selfie performance* LA.

⁶⁷ Vocal fry is a term used to describe a way of speaking that is common among young women, particularly American women such as The Kardashians. Naomi Wolf states: "'Vocal fry' is that guttural growl at the back of the throat, as a Valley girl might sound if she had been shouting herself hoarse at a rave all night" (Wolf, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/24/vocal-fry-strong-female-voice>).



Figure 53. Kate Durbin, 2014, *Hello Selfie* performance LA.

Here I focus on an intermedial performance of Durbin's titled *Hello Selfie*. *Hello Selfie* has been performed 4 times to date, the first in LA in July 2014 as part of *Perform Chinatown*. The work is described as "inspired by surveillance culture, Hello Kitty, Apple products, the teen girl tumblr aesthetic, Miley Cyrus, and Vanessa Beecroft" (Durbin, 2014). Durbin and a number of young female performers dressed in white bras and underpants cover their bodies in hello kitty stickers wearing blonde-rainbow dip-dyed wigs wander the streets of Chinatown, LA, engaging only with their phones taking selfies as they go.

Intra-actions and Material Agents

Durbin and her performers take on what she has termed the 'tumblr girl aesthetic', young women performing commodified subjectivities and appropriating cultural brands as a form of expression. Just like the teen girl decorates her tumblr page with images sourced from other online spaces or the teen girl in Ringrose (2010) who uses the playboy bunny on her bebo page, these performers use their bodies as the page/interface. They are performing IRL (In Real Life) what is more commonly seen in URL (Un Real Life), the performers are physically embodying the body/interface of the teen girl. In Ringrose's research it was more difficult for girls to embody the hyper-sexy persona's they presented online as: "online 'sexual confidence' does not necessarily translate into 'real-life' sexual confidence for girls in secondary school" (Ringrose, 2009, p.176). Using Ringrose's research as a way to explore the works of the artists in this chapter allows us to see that maybe their

work is a form of expression that younger women and teens are unable to embody due to the anxiety or “obsessive focus on protection”(Egan in Retallack, et al., 2016). These moral panics are explored in a number of research papers by Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose on teenage girls in UK schools, where they are not encouraged to take part in feminist rallies (Renold & Ringrose, 2012), or where social media acts as an affective force on their gendered embodiment through fourth wave feminist activism online (Retallack, et al. 2016).



Figure 54. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie* performance, 2015, Art Basel Miami.

Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) use Karen Barad’s theories on post-human performativity to explore not only the signification of the girls who wear ‘slutty’ clothing but also the material conditions surrounding their objectification. Through an encompassing study of the situations where young women are reduced to labels such as ‘slut’ Ringrose and Rawlings’ suggest a look at the clothing they wear and the space and time they occupy as material agents; the non-human agents that are also at play in ‘intra-actions’ where subjectivity is examined.

This study is an extension of Butler’s notion of performativity, where the performance of repetitive acts work to sustain culturally and socially constructed notions of ‘gender’. It is then more useful to look at the intra-active relationships between objects and subjects that combine Barad’s post-human performativity with Butler’s gender performativity when looking at subjectivities (URL/IRL). This

combination of object and action as marker of subjectivity is useful when thinking through the inter-medial performances here. In her study of young women engaged in the act of taking selfies Katie Warfield also refers to Barad's notion of intra-activity and agential realism stating selfies are "more than texts: they emerge as material-discursive intra-actions shaped by genealogically coalesced gendered apparatuses of bodily production" (Warfield, 2016, p7.). It is with this in mind that performing the act of taking of the selfie reveals much more than just a form of representation, where the relationships with material and immaterial objects affect the production of the image. In Durbin's performances the white bra and pants, the Hello Kitty stickers, the wigs and the mobile phones all act as material agents where interactions with these objects are important in constructing the hyper-real teen-girl subject. These affective material agents are also dependent on contextual and temporal situations. Where performing online has it's own temporal conditions, spectators are positioned in multiple contexts through the various strategies used. Here I investigate how these affective strategies work to fragment spectatorship and if this appropriation of teen-girl aesthetics disrupts notions of heteronormative femininity online.



Figure 55. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie* performance video still.



Figure 53. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie* performance at Art Basel Miami.

The Silent Selfie

The *Hello Selfie* performance lasts an hour and in that hour the female performers walk around the streets taking selfies with only one instruction from Durbin- do not speak. Because the figures of the Hello Kitty stickers that cover their bodies have closed mouths, performers are only allowed to meow should they feel the need. The silent and hyper-real performers' only form of communication is their bodies and their public and online actions or intra-actions. The over-the-top, compulsive selfie-takers in *Hello Selfie* embody many of society's assumptions of the teen girl as narcissist. Durbin describes these assumptions as violent towards women's bodies and in these public performances her use of duration and liveness cause the public audience to face this violence and experience the physical act of the selfie. Coining the term "passive aggressive performance art" Durbin (2014) sees the act of narcissism and disregard for the audience in the silencing of her performers as a form of empowerment for the performers and cites the work of Vanessa Beecroft as an inspiration to these performances, however the ethics and production of Beecroft's work has been highly criticised.⁶⁸ This public act of narcissism echoes

⁶⁸ However the work of Vanessa Beecroft comes under much criticism in her treatment of the performers and the critical claims she states to be making in her work. In 2001, Heather Cassils, Clover Leary & Julia Steinmetz took part in VB46 at the Gagosian Museum in New York. In their paper *Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft* the artists discuss the degrading working conditions of the performers revealing the contradictory nature in Beecroft's performances and photographs which ultimately do nothing to critique the fetishization and objectification of women prevalent in the fashion industry (Cassils, Leary, Steinmetz, 2006).

works by Hannah Wilke, where she was vindicated for performing her beautiful body as a form of narcissism rather than taken as a political statement. Jones describes Wilke's narcissism as a "revised feminist narcissism that externalises and polemicizes the wounds inflicted upon the Jewish, nonmale body/subject in Western patriarchy" (Jones, 1998, 195). This feminist narcissism displayed in *Hello Selfie* materialises in the passive aggressiveness of the performers. Through silencing her performers she takes away their voice and a line of defence, their only defence being the insular act. This insular act of selfie taking that involves only the performer, Durbin claims is an act that is not specific to just young women they are not the only demographic of selfie-takers.

In her study of the Australian craze 'sneaky hat selfies' Kath Albury discusses the double standards involved in the sharing of self-produced images by young men as opposed to young women. Men who perform these image where they are naked all for a hat covering their genitals are dismissed as funny or stupid, the young women who also took part in this activity are caught up in "the extra burden of representation" (Albury, 2015, p.1742). This study on the double standards of selfie taking highlights how women performing their bodies are already marked with measures of appropriateness and respectability and do not enjoy the same freedom as young men in producing selfies.

Embodying Teen Girl Aesthetics in the Body of an Adult Woman

Durbin's performers embody a form of tumblr girl aesthetic but these are *performed* tumblr girls, they are adult women playing out cultural tropes that don't directly apply to their specific age group. Durbin takes her influence from these teen girls online, she trawls their pages where they collate Sylvia Plath poetry with Francesca Woodman images, two tragic figures who ended their lives early and whose works are associated with a melancholic lonely girl image so popular among tumblr bloggers. She also states that this performance came from her having to defend the artistic merit of these teen girls on tumblr. However I find contradictions in how in an article written by Durbin and Alicia Eler they criticise

Tracy Emin's use of her personal history as a teen girl and Rineke Dijkstra's photographic portraits of teen girls as not as faithful to teen girl experience than that of tumblr girls when Durbin can only ever embody the aesthetic herself and in a way re-performs an unfaithful rendition. She states, "these are grown-ups, so to speak, channelling or connecting in some way with a constructed idea of the teenage girl aesthetic and adolescence" (Durbin & Eler, 2013). It is clear that Durbin and Eler are aware of this contradiction as in a disclaimer after the article they state:

*The authors would like to clarify that the teen girl tumblr aesthetic is just that, an aesthetic movement. While the majority of its practitioners are "literal" teen girls, not everyone who is working in this vein is a born a ciswoman, or is currently between the ages of twelve and nineteen. We realize this may seem like a contradiction to some, as the core of the aesthetic seems to center around vulnerability and telling one's own narrative (as opposed to the projection of an idyllic youth onto an "other"). But "teenagehood" is a social construct, an idea, which exists in the cultural consciousness. It has never been mostly literal. The teen girl tumblr aesthetic is also an idea, an attempt to articulate an exciting cultural movement that has emerged recently on the Internet, where one's identity is more fluid (Durbin & Eler, 2013).

Through their definition of the 'teen girl tumblr aesthetic' as something not directly related to "literal teen girls" Durbin and Eler in a way echo the message of Tiqqun in their symbolic use of the young girl as a signifier of capitalism and commodification. However they claim that there is less authenticity in the works of artists such as Emin or Dijkstra as they are adults commenting on a world they don't belong to. It seems to signify that it is ok for the tumblr teen girl aesthetic to

be appropriated by anyone as it is simply an aesthetic movement but there are boundaries as to how the work of artists on teenage girls can be produced.

Durbin claims that the unapologetic tumblr girl aesthetic persona she embodies is used to confront the public. She is not a teen girl but that doesn't matter, as the teen girl tumblr aesthetic is not specific to "literal" teen girls but just an aesthetic. Through performing this as an aesthetic and not a specific age group Durbin confuses assumptions of who can and can't embody certain "aesthetics". However I can't get away from the fact that she is critical of artists who use teenagers in their work, especially her focus on Tracy Emin as I feel that Emin's work is autobiographical and that it could only be made by her and about her life, whether she is addressing her childhood or adult experiences. Emin's practice is described as using "a raw, adolescent voice" and creating "adult renderings of the adolescent girl sensibility" is almost devaluing the autobiographical within Emin's work. The voice Emin uses in her work is her own and she is exploiting her own history. The argument in the text is that the confessional style of tumblr teen girls is much more raw and the stakes are higher as these digital confessions can sometimes be used as testimony⁶⁹.

⁶⁹ This is in reference to a case Durbin & Eler discuss where a teenage girl committed suicide and her friend reported her tumblr posts to the police (Durbin & Eler, 2013).

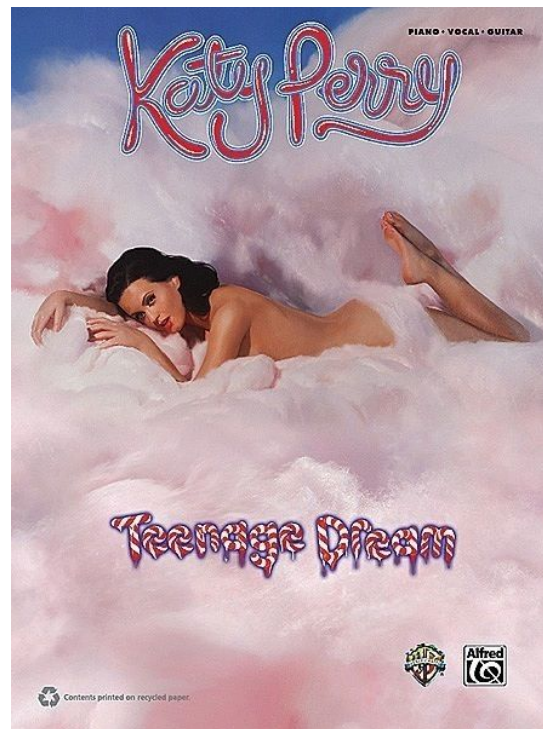


Figure 57. Katy Perry, Teenage Dream album cover.

In the same article they discuss the work of Katy Perry's album cover designer, the writers describe this dreamy, hyper-sexualised image of the sugary sweet teen girl as a form of adults hijacking the notion of adolescence which is something that is untrue or a rip-off. In this co-authored article Durbin defends the teen girl tumblr user as an artist in her own right stating that the art "object" extends to the bodies of girls both on and offline, "the fetish is not contained in a static image". In this Durbin is referring to the affective nature of teen girls interactions online, through their emotional and physical experiences in real life, even to the extent of their suicide. Such referencing is seen in the use of Plath and Woodman, two women who committed suicide. Indeed Durbin and Eler state that if Woodman were alive today tumblr would be her medium of choice. These young women are embodying their emotions, not simply creating images of them online. In this way the selfie is not just a 'static image' but also a physical act, one that Durbin wants the public to bear witness to in her *Hello Selfie* performances.

In this performance Durbin attempts to debase assumptions of the narcissistic teen girl, whilst also saying so what if teen girls are narcissists everyone is in this culture of online performance, why is the teen girl the victim of such criticism? I align Durbin's performance with movements such as the Slutwalk, in their rhetorical and unapologetic presence in the streets reclaiming identities typically viewed negatively. The Slutwalk has also been noted as an activity that teenage girls are not always permitted to take part in (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Ringrose and Renold refer to the use of the term 'slut' as a politics of "re-signification" in what Butler referred to in the re-appropriation of the term queer. However Slutwalks have come under fire by groups such as Black Women's Blueprint Collective and Association of Filipinas, Feminists Fighting Imperialism, Refueledization and Marginalisation (AF3IRM), for being a movement for middle and upper class white women and is highly criticised as another exercise in white feminism where black women do not have the privilege to re-appropriate the term 'slut' as a form of protest.⁷⁰ Durbin's performance of *Hello Selfie* in New York came under scrutiny at a post-performance artist talk when confronted with why she only used white slim performers. Durbin's answer being that the choice of performers was down to time constraints and not an aesthetic choice (Johnson, 2014, p.4). In her fourth rendition of the performance at Art Basel 2015 in Miami Durbin had a diverse range of women performers, who again performed for an hour in rainbow coloured wigs, moving through the crowds onto the beach ending he performance in the water.

In *Performative Acts*, Judith Butler discusses how the transvestite on stage can incite pleasure and applause, however the sight of the same transvestite sat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage and even violence (Butler, 1988, p.527). Durbin's performances are a strategy of exposing a demographic and an aesthetic that is normally only seen online and one that is ignored or not taken seriously. Her form of passive aggressive performance is a way to challenge

⁷⁰ See, Brison, S. (2011) and, Sayo, C. (2015).

spectators “in real life”. However the young women who perform tumblr teen girl aesthetic online are not always permitted to do so on the street. Perhaps the image of Durbin’s adolescent-drag on the street can compel fear, but is it lost in the fact that these are adult women? The problem for young women expressing their sexuality through their bodies online and in the street is that they are punished for being slutty or up for it. Yet one of the ultimate fantasies in pornography is the teen-girl. Like the artists in this chapter the porn performers are presumably consenting adults. Rather than inciting fear or rage, like the transvestite in Butler’s statement the performers in Durbin’s work run the risk in inciting sexual pleasure and that this overrides the message that these women are performing for themselves, or the ‘girl gaze’. There is always this risk when performing the female body in public, not being taken seriously due to typical perceptions of women performing narcissism and in many ways this is the point of these works being made so explicit.

In 2013 artist Signe Pierce and filmmaker Ali Coates produced the film *American Reflexx*. In this video Coates documents Pierce walking through popular tourist spot Myrtle Beach. Pierce is a tall blonde white woman, she wore a tight fitting short dress and heels and a large reflective dome disguised her face. In this video we see how Pierce creates a mass following and has verbal abuse hurled at her. The frustration of the crowds build as they are unable to figure out ‘what’ Pierce is. In the end a member of the public runs towards her and pushes her onto the ground, where a circle envelops around her, yet, still, nobody tries to help her up. Pierce was interested in performing a cyborg subject that referenced the type of faceless white woman used throughout media images, however she never imagined experiencing such violence. The documentation was edited into a 14-minute film, which, like Durbin’s performance, showed at Art Basel Miami.



Figure 58. Signe Pierce and Allie Coates, *American Reflexx*, 2013, video still.

Anna Watkins-Fischer uses the term 'adolescent drag' to describe practices that embody and "satirise" postfeminist messages of girl power. Watkins-Fisher discusses how the "once paternalistic and demeaning appellation 'girl' has increasingly become a recognisable queer re-signification of compulsory constructions of 'womanliness' presented in the media and certain strands of feminism" (Watkins Fisher, 2012, p.49). Watkins-Fisher also uses the term 'intermedial', which originates with fluxus art to describe the multiple forms this type of practice takes, such as online, live and video installation. For Watkins-Fisher intermedial describes work that simultaneously uses multiple platforms, "recalling intermedia and adolescence's shared status as intermediate forms organised by a logic of 'between-ness'". In this way Durbin's use of her and her performers' skin as interfaces to reflect the act of tumblr posting and online selfie sharing become intermedial works, they are multi-platform. Creating two works at once, in the form of the live performance and the act of posting their selfies on to the Facebook event page. Watkins-Fisher's term of adolescent drag veers more towards irony within the caricaturing of girl-power femininity, however her description of irony does not mean that the works that fall under this term are malicious in critiquing the actions of young women, the works rather critique "the limited spectrum of

representational models available to young women”(Watkins-Fisher, 2012, p.71).⁷¹
The performance is not personal- it’s political.

In *Hello Selfie* Durbin and her performers embody a type of cyborg subjectivity in relation to the selfie taker. Rather than confine the action of selfie taking to being experienced online or in public as an everyday act, they exaggerate the action as a form of rebellion and demand attention. Durbin describes this attention seeking as “passive aggressive”, where the performers impose themselves in their actions and their appearance; however deny interactive relationships with spectators. The performers command space to be watched as they watch themselves through their smartphones. The distance created in these performances places women in the position of object to be looked where their gaze is not directed at the spectator on the street rather to their phones. The women are performing for the online spectator, however Durbin states that they are performing the “girl gaze”(Durbin, 2016). She goes on to state that there is too much attention on the male gaze and to let young women appreciate their self-image without it having to be about being looked at by men. In images from the performances spectators try to get their faces into the selfies that the performers are taking, due to the fact the women are told not to speak or interact they are powerless in this interaction.

The adult woman playing out the performance of the teen/tween girl as explicit performance, challenges certain gazes that use Internet spaces to sexualise the ‘innocent’ bodies of girls. The woman embodying a type of fictional subjectivity as a political act draws attention to the construction of such subjectivities and also to the fact that there is no one fixed subject. It was my argument in chapter three that the practice of the #nomakeupselfie could not be subversive as it re-enforced the act of women wearing makeup as a norm. In contrast the selfies performed by Durbin and her troop could be considered subversive in the overt nature of the performance. The confusion of their meowing adult bodies dressed in virginal

⁷¹ Fischer Watkin’s text looks at the works of Ann Liv Young, Amber Hawk Swanson and Kate Gilmore as intermedial practices that expose and perform hyper-real commodity girliness through highly ironic performances.

white underwear but marked with girly stickers underpins their subversive nature. However the images posted on the Facebook page from the performances gained little attention and they are never the focus of the work when mentioned in interviews. For my investigation the relationships between the online images and offline images are important. In this work the act of uploading the selfie to Facebook is not a cyborg action (as per my interpretation of the cyborg as feminist intervention), as the posting of the selfies to a page where only invitees can see them does not interrupt the networks of domination. The subject in *Hello Selfie* was borne out of tumblr aesthetics; she is a digital construction. Therefore the physical manifestation of this digital subject is where the cyborg subversion lies. It is in the subject looking at herself, but looking with a difference. Through the spatio-temporal conditions of the live performance the act of the selfie is elevated to an act of exposure in itself, whereas the uploaded online selfie does not hold as much power. Intermediality is performed in *Hello Selfie*, however as a strategy in challenging the spectator it is only effective in its physical live capacity due to the limited forms of access to the images online.

Ann Hirsch's *Scandalishious* Project

One artist who uses this lack of diverse representations available to young women in her works is Ann Hirsch. Hirsch states that her 2007-2008 YouTube performance project *Scandalishious* represented a combination of two exclusive groups of young women that performed on Youtube: the faceless ass shaker, and the asexual vlogger (Hirsch, 2012a). The Scandalishious Project was produced when Hirsch was studying as a sculpture student and stated that her college professors told her she was too smart to be making such trashy art. Hirsch's online project may not have convinced her professors but eight years on the work stands as an important piece in this genre of online performance. Hirsch created *Caroline*, her geeky/sexy alter ego who performed for the camera in the form of dancing to popular music and posting the videos on YouTube. *Caroline* gained thousands of followers and a fan base of young men and women who requested dances and sent videos to Hirsch through her YouTube channel. Hirsch was 22 when she created *Caroline*, and states

that she embodies the kind of character Hirsch was at 18. In this way Hirsch is drawing on a part of her own personality whilst also performing a type of adolescent drag.

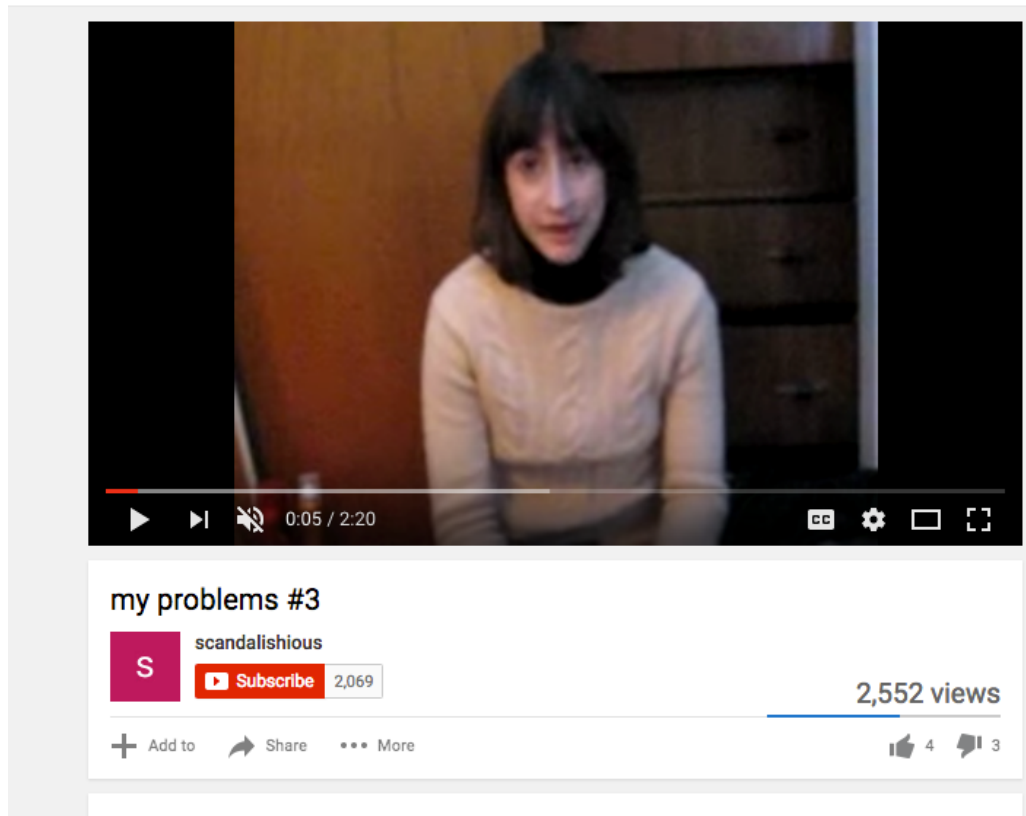


Figure 59. Anne Hirsch, *Scandalishous Project*, 2007-2008, screen grab.

The first few videos titled *my problems* were diaryesque confessions-to-camera and in them Caroline discusses regret and shows an over-emotional anxious persona trying to make sense of the world, the type of 'I just want to be understood' teenage girl seen represented in American teen-movies. After these confessional introductory videos Caroline recomposes herself and begins what would become her regular style of video post comprising of her dancing in her bedroom/home to popular music. Caroline took dance requests from her viewers and intermittently she would broadcast confessional style videos taken from different aspects of her life, for example in the video *caroline plus homework* (1min 24 sec, 651 views) she discusses her reading of books on video art and the

psychology of personality, in *laundry time* (2 min 54 sec, 1,130 views) she is doing her laundry whilst voicing her frustration at how people don't understand her.



Figure 60. Anne Hirsch, *Scandalishous Project*, 2007-2008, screen grab.

In one of the videos *HATE BOYS* (4 min 46 sec, 18,109 views), Caroline begins the video by plugging a blog where she states she will be posting her new single, working towards a new album or EP and tells viewers that by following the blog "it's a great way to stay hip on the Internet" here Hirsch is engaging in the performance of a 'microcelebrity' (Senft, 2012). The video released on 15th February 2009, the day after Valentines day, sparks Caroline to open up about "being really down", that she has got to thinking about why she is alone and how boys make her really mad. As the video plays she gets more and more frustrated about the types of requests she gets from men, as her frustration peaks she states; "I'm not a slut, I'm just exposing my sexuality". This statement is an example of the type of postfeminist sensibility Rosalind Gill discusses in her explanation of the move in advertising from the portrayal of women as sex objects to the portrayal of woman as active and desiring sexual subjects. (Gill, R, 2007a). Caroline portrays

this sexualized body as under her control that she is simply “exposing her sexuality” and in Gill’s terms performing as an active and desiring sexual subject, but her outburst of frustration that she is being perceived as a “slut” shows that she is still being looked at as a sex object. There is also the manner in which Hirsch plays Caroline in this video that sparks abuse from commenter’s. Her voice is over the top and at times lazy, as if she couldn’t be bothered, projecting a cool-hipster type persona. This performance style alongside the complaining about boys caused a response of 234 comments, most of which attack Caroline calling her a “DITZY BITCH” commenting on her physical appearance “ugly cunt. i want 4 minutes of my life back -_-” ... “LIKE OHH MY GODD, BECKY LOOK AT HER NOSE, ITS SOOO BIG!!” or sexist remarks like “can’t talk right cunt, back to the kitchen” or “Back to the kitchen whore”. There were a number of comments that supported Caroline and defended her video but mainly the response was nasty abuse, while a few others questioned whether the video was a joke or that she was trolling.⁷²

In interviews Hirsch has stated that Caroline is part of her personality, the project was an experiment or “therapeutic”, tired of feeling unsexy in her ‘real life’ *Scandalishous* was part art project and part personality exploration (Hirsch, 2012a). The autobiographical nature of these works is highlighted in their style of address (talking to camera) and the presentation of these videos on YouTube makes them harder to define in terms of authenticity. The platform of YouTube as a space to present the ‘true’ self or an ideal self is highlighted in Hirsch’s *Scandalishous* project. Hirsch is honest about the fact that she is an art student, as seen in her homework video, and therefore viewers could assume these videos are some form of performance art project. In another vein, the introductions to parts of her ‘real’ life show that maybe these videos are authentic or they are ‘hyper-real’ or an extension of the artist herself.

⁷² Troll: A person who makes a deliberately offensive or provocative online post. Hirsch is classified as a troll to some as they figure she is over acting in order to provoke a reaction from viewers.

Hirsch defends the authenticity of the work in stating that:

The Scandalishious Project not only looks like all the other videos of girls dancing in their pants that you might find on YouTube, it IS that. People are often mistaken in thinking I am critiquing or parodying the girls who are on YouTube dancing or monologuing. I am not. I am joining them (Hirsch, 2012b).

Hirsch's claim that she is not parodying or critiquing is a trivial one, in one sense she seems to be acting out a part of herself that would not be 'normal' for her, but the extension of the project into the art gallery and the creation of a different persona complicate this statement. This is also something that Durbin states of her work, that it is not a parody or exploitation rather it is exposing the teen girl aesthetic of social media to the public. Although I don't believe either artist to be exploiting the teen girl subjectivity I do believe that there is a form of parody being performed due to the fact that the performers are adults. Maybe this is a performance that could only be done by a woman older than the teen, not as parody but as some form of exposing the multiplicity of subjectivity. In the blurring of female subjectivity these works also examine how notions of girly femininity are not specific to teenage girls. Although teenagers are categorised as aging between 13-19, women are encouraged to stay young and beautiful for as long as possible. Embodying the teen-girl subject is just another strategy in perpetuating youthful feminine beauty.

If looked at from the angle of authentic performance rather than an act or parody Hirsch's project could be seen as a form of research and discovery. By inserting herself into that world without pre-calculating the performance Hirsch can further her understanding of what it means to be a young female performer on YouTube. Hirsch's insertion of herself into this world could be seen as a form of mimesis, which Luce Irigaray describes as the way "for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply

reduced to it" (Irigaray, 1977, p.76). By creating Caroline, Hirsch avoids exploiting herself rather she is exploiting the character and in turn finding ways, such as the gallery, to re-present these exploitations and highlight them to a new audience. Although by creating such performances on YouTube and not presenting them as performance art Hirsch could be seen to be adding to the problem she is trying to address. In defence of the accusation of compliance rather than subversion Hirsch has said that the type of girl she was playing out online was one she had not seen represented. Caroline was a cross over of two types of girls- "sexual and human" stating:

I saw two groups of young women performing on YouTube; the faceless ass shaker and the asexual vlogger. Never should the two mix. So I wanted to mix those two genres as a way to start having new examples for possibilities of female representation on the Internet (Hirsch, 2012a).

Hilary Robinson's application of Luce Irigaray's theories of mimesis to the practices of artists and theoreticians illustrate that through productive mimetic art practices:

The attempt to engage with a productive mimesis and to develop an appropriate morphologic can make us aware of places of resistance – reserves - in extant syntaxes. In doing so, we can recognise that we, as the subjects, women, are always elsewhere from the patriarchal site of the representation, 'woman' and we can identify the sites we have to re-traverse in order to expose their blind spots to signify women in the Symbolic (Robinson, 2006, p.200).

This type of performing a female subject that is not typically seen online could also be referred to as Braidotti's 'virtual feminine'. The virtual feminine has its roots in Irigaray's theories of challenging phallogocentric subjugation, combined with Deleuzian theories of becoming nomad. The concept of becoming woman or the

virtual feminine is to disrupt binaries, where minorities 'become molecular' and through this transcend borders where, using Hirsch's example, women are either slutty or sexy. Caroline is a virtual feminine subject in that she denies straightforward subjugation. This strategy of subversion, in Hirsch's work also happens through masochism. Hirsch's masochistic performances work in a way to challenge the viewer. Dancing in her bedroom, a trope popular with teen girls on YouTube, Hirsch's deliberate awkwardness interrupts normative scripts of the sexy backing dancing. Comments under the videos illustrate viewers frustrations and confusions as to who or what Caroline actually is.



Figure 61. Ann Hirsch, Screen grab of comments from *dancing daft punk* video.

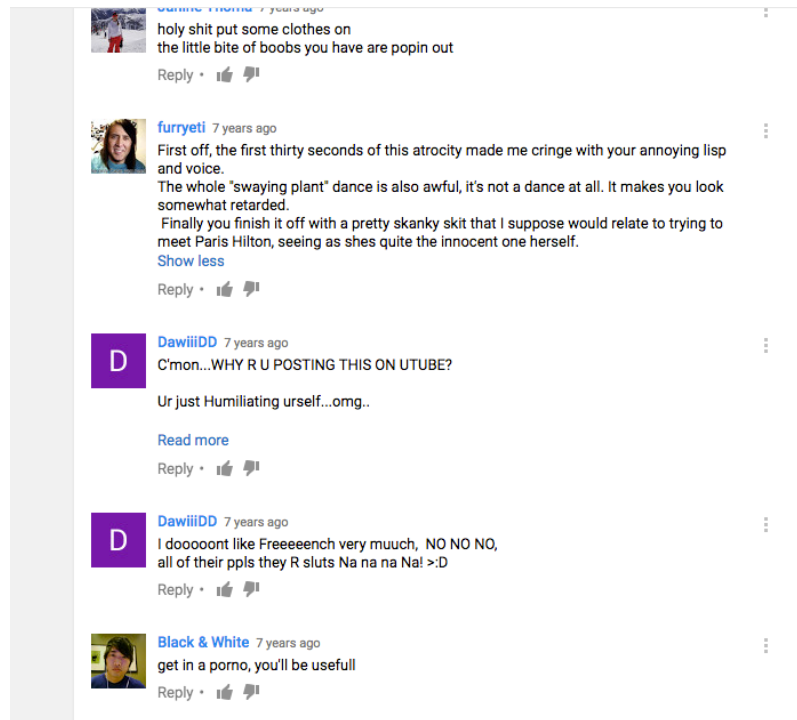


Figure 62. Ann Hirsch, Screen grab of comments from *Scandalishous* video

In Hirsch's work this productive mimesis that Robinson describes takes its form in the gallery. Hirsch presents her videos and documentation in the gallery in installations and live performances, and in a sense re-traverses and re-presents in order to reveal the 'blind spots' in performing the female subject online. These blind spots being the private online spaces where men proposition the female subjects.

The Spectator



Figure 63. Ann Hirsch, *Image of Performing Scandalishous*, 2011
Johannes Vogt gallery, New York.



Figure 64. Ann Hirsch, *Image of Performing Scandalishous*, 2011
Johannes Vogt gallery, New York.

On her website Hirsch shows documentation of a gallery performance by Caroline and in this she plays videos she has received from male fans. In the fan videos men talk to Caroline through their webcam stating how much they love her videos and make requests, one fan-Nick announces in his video that Caroline has:

The most sexiest dance videos I have ever seen, girl you have so much talent and I should know cos I'm a movie maker...watching you in all of those videos in your spandex, your leather your leotards, I gotta say you are soo sexy, I got 2 request that your next video you dance to something very sexy and wear leather cos girl you are so damn hot (Hirsch, 2011).

Hirsch plays this video of Nick during her live performance, which the audience laughs at. There is a type of sadness or desperation in these characters, Caroline and Nick. Hirsch has said that the type of women she performs in her works are ones who are "begging for attention" stating that:

There is the most risk in drawing attention to oneself, but also the most potential for reward. And the line between failure and success is so thin I am fascinated by how these women walk that line and what will pull or push them in one way or the other (Hirsch, 2012a).

The performance of these videos in the gallery creates a tension between spectator and performer. Caroline's awkward demeanour and the cringe aspect of the performance heighten the situation. There is also a fragmented or layered spectatorial view point, where Hirsch is filming herself from the webcam on her laptop as she dances to the song *I wanna go* by Britney Spears with her back to the audience projecting from the laptop to a screen above. The audience has the option to watch the screen or the real performance and they are also inside the world of the performance as well as being spectators of it on screen due to their position in the background of Hirsch's webcam. Hirsch also engages in a live Google chat with one of her followers as 'Caroline'. In this exchange the man enquires about a video he sent her of him dancing. The man then asks if he is attractive to Caroline and if she would consider kissing him on a first date. He states that he is having a midlife crisis and is not attracted to his wife any more as

she put on too much weight after their second child. He also talks of his own body insecurities and thanks Caroline for being sympathetic to his libido problems. The audience are able to see Hirsch's face as she responds; her reaction to some of the comments incites humour in the audience. This positioning of the audience within and outside the work is strategic and creates a tension in the spectators, as they are both passive spectators and active participants. This position is similar to how spectators of *Hello Selfie* position themselves in the background of many of the performer's selfies.

There is a sense of boundary crossing in making the spectator part of the work, moving away from the familiar position of viewing embarrassing videos on personal devices to becoming part of one forces the viewer to be complicit in the work. Hirsch performs to camera as Caroline. Lyrics like: *"Shame on me, To need release, Uncontrollably, I wanna go all the way, Taking out my freak tonight, I wanna show all the dirt, I got running through my mind"* only exaggerate the awkwardness of the performance. The confrontational breaking down of traditional viewing positions is challenging, provocative and tragicomic.

Hirsch also highlights issues of dependency and authenticity in some fan videos where they attempt to find out more about the 'real' Caroline. One fan sent a video of himself dancing in a giraffe outfit asked Caroline: "Please tell us a little about yourself! We know so little about you. You are so beautiful and have a great personality". The anonymity one can assume on the Internet juxtaposed with these fan requests to find the 'real' Caroline exposes these online spaces as stages for self-expression and also highlights how many users treat the performers on these stages as authentic. Much like in chapter three, audiences are happy to believe a performance is authentic so long as they are not betrayed. Hirsch stopped producing videos on YouTube leaving a final message to her fans Hirsch/Caroline did not break the illusion of the performance as per Essena O'Neill on Instagram. These two performances are different in many ways, however for the fans of such performances it is important that the character stick to script, whether it is for art purposes or in pursuit of microcelebrity status, or both.

The forms that Hirsch's *Scandalishious* project takes are intermedial and multi layered. Sometimes presented in the gallery as an edited video and others she performs as Caroline making her audience members complicit in the works. The fact that 'Caroline' did not fit into typical notions of the postfeminist subject and confused boundaries as to what her subjectivity represented caused frustration to online viewers. This confusion of the subject displays a type of posthuman 'virtual feminine' subject that Braidotti speaks of as a way to challenge normative notions of woman. Hirsch's gallery-based performances as Caroline were intermedial in their use of webcamming, live chat and projecting her screen for the audience to view. Although Hirsch's online character never made explicit her position as a performance artist her interventions on YouTube create a deeper understanding of the relationships a character like Caroline build. The comments made on the YouTube videos were also turned into a video reel, compiling these comments and presenting them as an artwork in such a large volume transform the everyday-ness of the comments in to an affective artwork.

The act of re-performing Caroline for a gallery audience draws the public into acts that are normally performed in private, or where contexts are collapsed (Wesch, 2009). Dancing for a YouTube audience and creating online relationships with men who send videos of themselves dancing are activities that happen in private or online. Although Hirsch may seem to be exploiting the men who interact with her she also exploits herself, or 'Caroline', and to her audience 'Caroline' is an authentic person. The lines here are blurred, but engaging in these online activities where authenticity is performed is a feminist strategy in exposing what happens when young women perform female subjectivity, whether they are authentic or not.

Louise Orwin's *Pretty Ugly*

Durbin's work is clearly performance in its explicit and over the top nature, her strategy is to be explicit through embodying digital subjectivities and make the public face these IRL (in real life). Hirsch's performance is close to her own subjectivity and one that she is sympathetic to; eager to explore the exposure of a

female subject that does not fit in to 'common knowledge' tropes of the teen girl/young woman. Hirsch's exposing of her online relationships with men through shared dancing videos and in the nasty comments on her videos uncovers realities facing online feminist intervention. In the work of Louise Orwin we are presented with the performance of teen girl masquerade where authenticity is performed as a form research to inform a live theatre show.

Louise Orwin's performance practice focuses on the different representations of women seen in mediated culture. She explores stereotypes and pushes them in her performances. Works like *Humiliation Piece* (2011) and *The Barbie Series* (2011) are confrontational in that they challenge participants to take part in objectifying and humiliating the female performer. Reminiscent of Marina Abramovich's 1974 performance *Rhythm 0* or Yoko Ono's 1965 *Cut Piece*, Orwin's *Humiliation Piece* invites audience members to literally humiliate her, playing truth or dare with them where she will do whatever they tell her so long as they answer a question she asks them. Dares include: 'do the Macarena whilst standing in baked beans and custard', to which she then casts the camera on the 'darer' and asks: "would you do me?" And, "did the beans do anything for you?" Similarly in *The Barbie Series*, Orwin invites the spectator-participant into a "female masochist dreamworld" "Mixing hello-kitty-kitsch-chic with S&M props, this dark, postfeminist imagining asks its visitors to engage in a very intimate interaction with the prostrate female body before them" (Orwin, 2014a). These two examples of Orwin's work show her live art installations and her concern with postfeminist identity, how the female body is viewed, how it can be manipulated by the public through this masochistic performance whilst managing to deflect the humiliation back onto the spectator/participant.

Pretty Ugly

Moving on from the live participatory works Orwin spent most of 2012 and 2013 documenting reactions based on three video performances she posted on YouTube. Orwin created three different characters based on popular teen-girl

personas: the emo girl, the specky/geeky girl and the beautiful blonde girl. In her video posts Orwin's teen-girl characters asked the public of YouTube to judge if they were pretty or ugly, provoking responses from the public which were gathered over a year of the videos being broadcast on YouTube. These videos were a response to Orwin's discovery of thousands of videos made by girls aged 9-13, in these 2-3 minute videos the girls speak directly to the camera asking the viewer to respond to the question "Am I pretty or Am I ugly?" By placing herself in the shoes of these young girls Orwin states:

I wanted to experience it myself, and to present the trend in a new light. As I became a regular stalker and lurker of the trend and the communities on YouTube that were posting and commenting on the original videos, it struck me that I needed to interact with the girls, the communities, with this generation. And- **I wanted to know what it was like** (Orwin, 2014b).

Between the three videos Orwin received 4000 comments, 70% of which were negative, of all her commenters she states 60% were male and 40% female, 80% of the female commenters were under 18, while 70% of male commenters were over 18 and 70% of these comments were negative as opposed to the female commenters coming in at 30% negative (Orwin, 2014c). These statistics were included in a talk by Orwin at the Southbank Centre in 2014, and although they are based on user information, which is not always truth, Orwin delivers them as fact.

The 'Real Me'

Aside from the statistics Orwin presents how the story of Becky and "Bobby" arose from the research. Becky was the emo girl who provoked a response via private message from Bobby, a young male who related to Becky's identity issues stating that he too had been bullied at school. Orwin describes the ethical position she was forced into; to continue the lie and chat to this young man online or be honest about her true identity, she decided to continue the conversation as Becky.

However, Bobby eventually revealed his true identity. Bobby turned out to be a 42-year-old man in America. Once he had sent an identity-revealing picture of himself Bobby began to request and demand sexual images of Becky. Orwin stopped contact at that point.

Whether Orwin's statistics of her viewer's identities are genuine or not, this research reveals the danger of young girls displaying and performing online, whether to gain fame,⁷³ or to find out what strangers think they look like. Some are being preyed on by older men and by trolls⁷⁴ who are out to abuse anyone they can and these teen girls are perfect targets for such abuse. The platform of YouTube provides a space for young people to display their identities and personas and seek validation on their looks, although the argument of authenticity comes into play in these arenas it is clear to see that young women are subjecting themselves to abuse by performing on these platforms and an obsession with image and self-objectification is heightened by these opportunities. As Sherry Turkle explains in her 2011 book *Alone Together* "Our lives on screen may be play, but they are serious play" (Turkle, 2011, p.212). Orwin also noted that even though she was experimenting on YouTube and knew it was all fake (on her part), she still got sucked into checking her phone all the time and logging online to see if she had any new comments, becoming an obsession quite quickly. "We are stimulated by connectivity itself. We learn to require it, even as it depletes us" (Turkle, 2011, p.227). As I have stated in previous chapters many sociological researchers state how unproductive it is to describe girl's online interactions as dangerous. Performing subjectivities such as the *Pretty/Ugly* trend comes from a system where women are rewarded for being pretty and receive comments based on whether they are pretty or ugly. This postfeminist self-surveillance manifests through the system of 'likes' and comments', and becomes addictive, as Orwin has stated

⁷³ Some videos were simply to lure followers on to personal channels.

⁷⁴ Troll: A person who makes a deliberately offensive or provocative online post.

above. In the attention economy that is social media images are important and getting attention for looking good becomes the ultimate aim.

The Live Show



Figure 65. Louise Orwin, *Pretty Ugly*, 2013-present, performance still.



Figure 66. Louise Orwin, *Pretty Ugly*, 2013-present, performance still.



Figure 66. Louise Orwin, *Pretty Ugly*, 2013-present, performance still.

With the research gathered from her online performances, Orwin created a theatre show where she performs on roller-skates as she explains the journey of pretending to be a teenage girl on YouTube. On her website Orwin's description of the show goes:

This show is about you rating me based solely on my looks...

It is also about a recent worldwide trend of teenage girls posting videos on YouTube asking viewers to rate their looks. *Pretty Ugly* follows my trail of research into how Generation YouTube uses the ever-widening field of social networking to reach others. There is a live YouTube experiment, a tender and inappropriate love story, and some of my childhood toys. It is about our obsessions, and pretensions, and teenage girls- but don't let that put you off. It is about you and me and the Internet.

Orwin starts the show lying on the floor of the stage wearing a blond wig, a pink slip dress and roller-skates. She is looking into her camera phone which is linked to a projector which screens to the audience, Doris Day is singing *Que sera sera* to us...“will I be handsome will I be pretty”. Orwin then sings Britney Spear’s *Hit me baby one more time* into the phone, which directly projects out to the audience. Orwin’s intra-active performance uses the material elements of the show such as the camera phone as not just an apparatus for screening but to illustrate how the technology works as part of a networked affect.⁷⁵

Orwin roller-skates around the stage clumsily bending over to pick up her mic and tiara as she greets the audience. In an American accent Orwin reads from a projected autocue in a stream of consciousness what appears to be the type of script young women use on the pretty/ugly videos. After 10 minutes of skating and dancing and asking the audience via projections to tweet and vote on whether she is pretty or ugly Orwin begins to introduce herself. She (Louise) is open with the audience about who she is and then she talks about the project and wanting to know why teenage girls make these videos and trying to understand by doing the same thing herself. She plays the video on a screen and also projects onto the screen with a second projector some of the comments made about the videos posted. Orwin is doing all of this on roller-skates. The fact that she is trying to balance and lift all of this equipment around creates a heightened environment for the audience who are possibly expecting her to fall over. She is literally and theoretically balancing between keeping it together and falling over, mirroring the juxtaposition of the question: Am I pretty? (Succeeding) or am I ugly? (Failing). Orwin tells the Bobby/Becky story reluctantly as she doesn’t want to make it about Bobby but feels it must be addressed. She summarises all the relationships she had online by using her camera phone. Sitting on the floor using dolls, trolls and teddies to depict the characters, she states: “I started out an artist and ended up a teenager”. Bobby, who is depicted as a Sylvanian Family badger interrupts and

⁷⁵ Paasonen, Hills and Petit (2015, p.3) suggest that theories of networked affect can help us to see “how individual, collective, discursive and networked bodies both human and machine... are modified by one another.

demands his story is told; Orwin complies. Orwin changes again, and gets a male member of the audience up to play Becky, the two read from a script on the screen, the man wears Minnie Mouse ears, Orwin is wearing a Japanese schoolgirl costume. This role reversal and actual playing out of the situation and putting the male audience member in the position of Becky is a strategic method by Orwin to make the audience consider the sexual exchange through the eyes of Becky but performed by an adult man. This replaying of the online exchange is similar to Hirsch's gmail interaction with her male fan. By involving the audience in these exchanges the artists draw the audience further in to the performance. There is humour to both situations, but the humour is soon overshadowed by the content of the conversation, in Orwin's case the seriousness of grooming overshadows the humour.

Orwin's work is masochistic and challenges audiences to engage in conversations that are uncomfortable and outside of their world. Through performing the teen girl Orwin herself became emotionally involved and mentally affected by the performance. Orwin experienced the networked affect of performing online as the teen girl, and through this she created the intermedial performance work for an audience to also become affected by, in the relationships between the technology used and the participation of audience members. The intra-active elements in the performance include her outfits, wigs, crown, roller-skates, mobile phone all act as material elements of affect. They act as signifiers around which the character is created. The infantile nature of play performed by Orwin and her use of teddy bears to tell the story of online grooming display an adolescent drag which is subversive through the image of her adult body. However the careful framing of her online videos made it easy to mask her adult body and here we see how illusions of authenticity can be performed online.

In an interview for Buzzcut festival, Glasgow, Orwin explains how the show aims to highlight a growing trend of masochistic femininity performed on YouTube through these videos, and to shed light on a phenomenon that an older generation may not be aware of (Orwin, 2014d). She explains her dilemma in the fact that even

though this work is made in response to these videos of teen girls, the very people she is addressing are too young to actually see the show, which can be frustrating. But in response to this, Orwin holds workshops for teen girls alongside the shows in order to spread the message of the dangers of such online performances. She has also created a number of video works made on the streets where she interviews teenage girls and asks them to respond to the statement "I am..." on a piece of paper and to discuss this. On her website she explains how it was important for her to interact with young women and discuss their experiences of social media, rather than being a "passive bystander". The images of these works are reminiscent of Gillian Wearing's work *Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992–3) which deals with confessions from strangers on the street.

In *Pretty/Ugly* Orwin plays with alter ego as a form of data collection and research. Through her inauthentic performances on YouTube she created a hyper-real performance for a theatre audience. This transition from Internet 'spy' to theatre performer is a strategy that has powerful consequences as we can see from the Bobby/Becky relationship. It is also an eye opening experiment into authenticity online.

Orwin's performances of the teen girl were based on popular tropes presented in mainstream media. The investigative nature of the work places her performances within Robinson's description of maintenance mimesis, in that the performance she is creating online does not subvert or question the act but simply adds to the high count of similar videos made by "literal teens". However what Orwin does with the research gathered from the online performances exceeds the notion that the videos are not productive. The resulting work from the research has created a large talking point for the issue, with newspaper articles and national press focusing on Orwin's work. It not only affects the audiences who attend the theatre but to the mass public through the press. This networked affect through the dispersion of Orwin's experience is also seen in Ulman's work. The two practices although not directly transforming the girl subject of social media uncover how

postfeminist performances of white female beauty are perpetuated, monitored and encouraged online.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced theories that complicate understandings of who or what is the teenage girl. The teenage girl has been characterised as an identity choice rather than a period of a woman's life. Authors such as Tiqqun use the teen girl as an analogy for capitalist systems of control. In sociology researchers Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber looked at the teenage girl in the 1970s through subcultural practices, describing bedroom culture as the form of expression taken by teenage girls who were confined to performing in domestic spaces. The act of dancing to camera for a YouTube audience means that these expressions of subcultural practices are presented to an invisible audience where contexts are collapsed and the videos are open to criticism and/or praise.

The art practices analysed here represent a demographic of artists who are engaging in adolescent drag as a form of subversive performance. Drawing from theories of performativity and the politics of parody I have situated these works as forms of subversion and also as forms of online performativity, where they are both maintenance and productive. The nature of these works is to draw attention to and to question assumptions around what a teenage girl is or should be. Through their intermedial performances the artists both engage new publics into this conversation whilst simultaneously contribute to the catalogue of images of teenage girls online. In the case of Hirsch and Durbin it could be said that the images that they submit online represent hybrid subjects, such as the geeky/sexy or the hyper-real cute kawaii girl, that do not conform to the typical, common knowledge tropes seen in makeover and haul videos on YouTube or the 'new femininities' seen in the performances of Ulman and O'Neill. In the case of Orwin, her videos do add to the same field she is interrogating online, however the research gained from doing so informed her practice and drew attention to the practice of pretty/ugly videos. Durbin states that in the silencing of her performers

they are engaged in 'passive aggressive performance art', her performers ignore the public yet demand attention as they march through the streets in their underpants and wigs. Through performing the 'girl gaze' and over exaggeration of the teen girl subject, on the street, in the gallery, and, in the theatre, these artists raise questions as to who can and can't perform certain subjects and interrogate the online construction of these subjects. The artists use self-imaging technology in their performances that act as intra-active objects, as do their clothing and styling. These objects of identity act as objects of affect, both in terms of the performers and also the spectators. In each of the performances spectators become visible within the works as the artists film themselves in front of the audience. This type of complicit spectatorship works to reflect these performed subjectivities onto the spectator and they act as rhetorical performances where viewing contexts are compromised and interactivity is both implied and denied.

In my own practice I have struggled with the type of character I perform. The construction of SweetHeart is very stereotypical of the white hetero-normative Barbiesque notion of feminine beauty. It has been a worry in the work that I might be demeaning one category of female subjectivity or one particular group in society. My aim with constructing SweetHeart was to create a subject that fashioned herself purely on the objects that were sold to her and that related to a type of female beauty that made her visible. The notion of performing a girl does not limit SweetHeart to teenage or pre-teen status, as seen in this chapter through Judith Butler citing the term girl is a method of citing a norm and remaining a viable subject; youth and beauty being the markers of the norm that make women visible. Through my explicit citing and at times overacting the norm my aim is to push this norm to the point of absurd as a way to expose its construction. In my practice I employed many strategies to achieve this exposure. I draw on theories of the dialectical image, or showing the show, as well as using what Lawrence et al, describe as intra-active objects to expose the construction of the digital self. In my works I wear clothing that act as intra-active objects, as well as the mobile phones and selfie sticks. The presentation of the Periscope videos are on selfie sticks at

different levels in the gallery. As mentioned in Chapter One, the positioning of the spectator is important to the work in order to create an affective and embodied response. I ask the spectator to bend over and move around in order to see the work. Much like how the artists in this chapter use different methods of installation or interaction, these strategies are important to creating heightened relationships where viewing these types of performances would usually happen in private or on personal devices. I have detailed my installation methods in Chapter Six and in Appendix A. I also discuss in more depth the decision making process and the reasons for using certain intra-active objects as affective strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE

Submission or Subversion?

It is not the contents within the frames but the decided nature of the frames themselves that 'ratify' or 'pornographize' (Schneider, 1997, p.15).

Whenever you put your body online, in some way you are in conversation with porn (Hirsch, 2012b).

One thing that is overwhelmingly apparent is the way in which the Internet and new media along with popular culture have created a space of sexuality which borrows its vocabulary from the world of pornography and the sex industry (McRobbie, 2011).

The works explored in Chapter Four used online spaces to glean content for live performance works. Although each of the artists created interventions on social media the works were performed through masquerade and the appearance of authenticity without breaking character. I argued that although the online interventions did not have subversive effects the subsequent 'In Real Life' works used controlled contexts within galleries, art events and theatres to highlight how gender performativity operates in performing postfeminist subjectivities on social media. These works exposed the spectator to the construction and performance of postfeminist subjectivities posted on social networks to create environments that directly involved the body performing. In this chapter I look at practices that attempt to interrupt flows of information on social networks where performances of white hetero-normative female subjectivity are typically aligned with cultural norms. These works perform the female body through forms of sexual agency and denial of visual pleasure.

The first case study is an early example of an online project by photographer Natacha Merritt. Merritt's work pre-dates social media as we know it

today, however her website was a self-produced platform where she shared her personal images. In this chapter I am aligning Merritt's project with works created on Instagram and 'Porn 2.0'⁷⁶ to frame how artists posting their self-made "pornographic" content online, as a form of online intervention in these different contexts, attempt to reject the body produced for the male gaze. Merritt's project is important to this chapter, as the feminist debates that her work provoked are relevant to more recent practices. Merritt's work was explicit in its sexual nature and arguments were formed around the validation of the work as 'art' and as 'feminist'. It was argued that there was agency in these images as they were self-produced. This chapter looks at how self-produced content online assumes a type of agency and whether it is achievable on social media.

In her Instagram works Leah Schrager posts selfies where she is posed in typical pornographic positions of sexual submission and enticement, the images are distorted to make it difficult for the viewer to catch a glimpse what would typically be the 'money shot'. Schrager's artworks take inspiration from her work as an online 'naked therapist', where she uses therapy and getting naked to give advice to men over skype. The conflicts that occur in Schrager's work are similar to the ones created around Merritt's. Merritt never claimed her work was feminist, however Schrager claims her work is part of the new 'fourth wave'. The fact that these works create images that are so aligned with mainstream pornography where typically women are submissive and men are dominant contradict Schrager's subversive feminist claims. In fact it is unclear if Schrager intends her work to be subversive. She has said that she makes work for the male gaze however removes it from 'men's hands'. In this way Schrager claims that her agency lies in the fact that her work is self-produced. In previous chapters I looked at online practices that claimed agency due to their self-produced nature. I argued that pertaining to codes of female subjectivity so aligned with commodified notions of femininity it was difficult to identify how agency and empowerment were performed. I associated these performances with McRobbie's 'postfeminist masquerade' and

⁷⁶ Although not a widely used term, Porn 2.0 has been used by Mowlocabowas (2010) to describe how online pornography is moving towards becoming a social media space on sites where users upload their content and interact through profiles and commenting.

notions of emancipated feminism. This chapter seeks to find agency in these self-produced images where the lines between art and pornography are blurred.

Following on from these works I look at Faith Holland's porn interventions. A site-specific work placed on porn sites that are described as 'Porn 2.0', like in social media users create content and upload it and interact with other users. Unlike the two previous artists Holland does not perform sexual acts or promiscuity rather she does the opposite. On a porn tube site where users upload their own homemade porn Holland posts pre-recorded videos that she labels with alluring titles and in the videos Holland performs mundane or odd acts like shaving her legs or licking the screen. In these interventions Holland does the reverse of Schrager and Merritt, yet the works are only viewable on the porn site or on Holland's website but even then viewers must engage with porn pop-up adverts.

In Chapter One I discussed the subversive nature of Lynn Hershman Leeson's work *Deep Contact* where by positioning the spectator as a physical player in the work and seemingly offering up some form of visual-sexual pleasure yet not delivering on this interrupts typical narratives of the submissive woman on screen whilst also makes the spectator a key part of the work. The digital interruptions created by Hershman Leeson were described as cyborgian in their failure to deliver on traditional narratives where interruptions to the works such as the glitch or unexpected storytelling diverted spectator experience. Visual interruptions such as glitches, distortion, and proximity to screen/camera lens offer up strategies of possible subversion. The works here offer similar interruptions however, with the power of commodification on social media and the repetition of norms maintaining gender stereotypes the lines between art and pornography become blurred.

Art and Pornography

Karen Wilkes states: "Displaying uninhibited sexuality continues to be central to the white female and provides her with access to the neo-liberal realm"(2015, p.21). It is in this neo-liberal realm that the artists here perform. Their alignment with traditional gender stereotypes in terms of white hetero-normative sexuality and their use of platforms that privilege these performances trouble their feminist

claims. In an afterword to her book *The Pornography of Representation*, Susanne Kappeler notes that women artists must move away from "avant-garde experiment with technique" where practices should not produce "Art for the museums and products for the market place" (1986, p.221). Kappeler's problem with women artists creating work in the spaces of their objectification (i.e. the market places and museums) is that women will never be able to escape exploitation as long as they create work within it. However refusing to interrogate these spaces of objectification means an absence of the female voice altogether.

We still need to be more precise as to the ways in which the process works and how the experience of sexuality, in en-gendering one as female, does effect or construct what we may call the female subject (de Lauretis, 1989, p167).

De Lauretis writes this in response to Catharine MacKinnon's analogy of how women are marked sexual and attractive to males or "beings that exist for men"(ibid). MacKinnon's analogies negate women's experiences as sexual subjects and the processes of their subject-hood by en-gendering them and making broad assumptions. Martha Mahoney is also critical of MacKinnon's claims that white women are not privileged due to their whiteness as this discounts the fact that white women are oppressed, although MacKinnon states "what is done to women of color is more, added, and worse" (Mahoney, 1993, p.219). The problem with MacKinnon's arguments according to Mahoney is that her tokenism towards the concept of 'race' works to put "white women back at the center of the definition of harm"(ibid, p.231).⁷⁷ Donna Haraway also criticises MacKinnon's radical feminism in its obliteration of "the authority of any other women's political speech and action"(Haraway, 1991, p.159).⁷⁸

Rebecca Schneider describes the performed body of the feminist performance artist as "explicit", where 'explicate' derives from the Latin to mean unfold. The bodies she frames as explicit also "explicate bodies in social relation"

⁷⁷ Mahoney states that in recognising the privileged positions white middle class women occupy "only then can we develop both theory and a transformational struggle, based on the understanding, needs, and struggles of all women"(Mahoney, 1993, p.231) .

⁷⁸ Haraway criticises white socialist and radical feminisms in their "Embarrassed silence about race " as a "devastating political consequence" (Haraway, 1991, p.160).

and “unfold the body...peel back layers of signification that surround their bodies like ghosts at a grave” (Schneider, 1997, p2). Speaking of the performances of artist Carolee Schneeman and the controversial Art Forum advert by Lynda Benglis⁷⁹, Schneider states that the problem female artists faced in the use of their body is not in its use as an art object but in “the agency of the body displayed, the author-ity of the agent” (Schneider, 1997, p.35). This author-ity of being nude on your own terms, as the artist and the object of critical inquiry, troubled binaries of acceptable or appropriate behaviour, in terms of there being a time and a place for certain performances by women. These crossovers by female artists on their own terms shook and disturbed binaries of appropriateness. In the case of works created by women that explicate their sexual experiences or sexual desires, their self-produced performances invite viewers and in Schneider’s terms they give “permission to see”. As in the case of Jennifer Ringley, the fact that these images are produced and authored by women of themselves for mass consumption has invoked binary terrorism and reveals the social structures of tolerated activity for women.

Words like ‘sexualisation’ or ‘pornified’ are used to describe the behaviour of young women who over-share or over-expose images of their bodies in the visual world of social media. Young women are caught in-between being too prudish or too slutty. In the 1960s feminist critics of Hannah Wilke’s works, created with her naked body, accused her of narcissistic indulgence, Wilke’s beautiful body caused many to not take her work seriously. As if they could not see past her “beautiful” body to the point of the work itself, these critics were part of the problem Wilke was addressing. Wilke’s challenging works that defy the male gaze through the manipulation of her body in videos such as *Gestures* 1974, or in her performances where she applies clay to her body were criticised for submitting to the very issue she was addressing. This is a challenge for female artists making feminist statements about the female body in their works; too beautiful and you are a narcissist, too ugly/fat your work is abject. Lucy Lippard, one of Wilke’s critics addressed the problem with women making art with their own bodies stating that the male artists “can use beautiful, sexy women as neutral objects or surfaces, but

when women use their own faces and bodies, they are immediately accused of narcissism... Because women are considered sex objects, it is taken for granted that any woman who presents her nude body in public is doing so because she thinks she is beautiful" (Lippard in Jones, 1998, p.175).

In 1989 artist, porn star and sex worker Annie Sprinkle performed *Post Porn Modernism*. Sprinkle, invited members of the audience at her show in *The Kitchen*, New York to look into her vagina as it was opened with a speculum. After a period of talking about her experiences Sprinkle invites audience members to queue up where they are given a torch to look into her cervix. At the end of the performance Sprinkle engages in a ritual performed by ancient sacred prostitutes by masturbating with a vibrator getting the audience to shake rattles that was done because "sexy spirits love sound" (<https://anniesprinkle.org/ppm-bobsart/script.html>, accessed 30/01/17). In a review of Sprinkle's *Post Porn Modernism* for the Village Voice, Carr describes that in seeing too much of the artist (as in her cervix) Sprinkle transcends sexuality, but Rebecca Schneider states that this doesn't transcend but rather is a provocation. "It is the politicized link she is making explicit between sexuality, vulnerability, and power that is "hardly able to be seen"—out of the bounds of vision for a society habituated to maintaining "perspective" by maintaining distinctions between sexuality and politics, nature and culture, or porn and art" (Schneider, p.77). Sprinkle's provocation of female sexuality is explicated in the live performance, where the screen is removed and the spectator is faced with the actual body of the woman. In this instance Sprinkle is in control of her self-sexualised body, the space created between audience and performer distinctly marks the construction of the performance. Schneider cites Foucault in how power and knowledge are inherently discursive formations and that the events of these discursive formations impact bodies in time and space thus "bodies, and the social organization of bodies, are immediately implicated in any scene or site of knowledge"(Schneider, 1997, p.22). The site of knowledge in *Post Porn Modernism* is removed from its pornographic origins to the theatre and gallery space. This shifting context creates a new reading of the work where the spectator is permitted by the subject to look. This work was created at the height of feminist debates around pornography in the 1980s where MacKinnon and

Andrea Dworkin lead the campaign to ban pornography where it was described in legislation by Minneapolis and Indianapolis city councils as “a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex that differentially harms women” (Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988, p.33). Sprinkle represents a positive take on pornography and sex work where she uses her experiences as a form of entertainment and education. For Dworkin and MacKinnon someone like Sprinkle does not represent the majority of pornographic actors and sex workers, drawing from their own experiences as a sex worker (Dworkin) and a lawyer (MacKinnon) the two challenge the fact that pornography can be anything other than sexual abuse against women. For anti-porn feminists, watching porn gave men permission to treat women as sexually subservient whereas anti-censorship feminists argued by banning all porn denied women any chance of engaging in their own sexual fantasies. Linda Williams also makes the point that not all porn is about heterosexual women, for instance porn for gay men or lesbian women (Williams, 2004, p.6).

The works in this chapter engage in various forms of what might be deemed pornographic representation in their art practices through social media. The challenge with such works to gain agency is that the platforms they perform on in many ways encourage the sexual objectification of women and their subordination to men. Holland’s video works challenge assumptions of servicing male desire through strategies of subversion and intervention whilst Schrager’s work uses the male gaze as a performance strategy. Feona Attwood (2011) and Michele White (2006) discuss how women webcam operators and women-run alt porn (alternative porn) sites challenge feminist arguments “that porn subordinates women, or makes them passive or objectified, or subjects them to conventional standards of beauty or norms of femininity, or that porn excludes women both as producers and consumers” (Attwood, 2011, p.209). In her essay: *Through the Looking Glass? Sexual Agency and Subjectification Online* Feona Attwood states that:

Although public discussions of online sexuality have frequently focused on sexual deviance, addiction, degradation and danger, the Internet also offers

unprecedented freedom to create, distribute and access a much more diverse and interesting set of sexual representations and practices than have previously been available (2011, p.207).

In using strategies of over-exposure and under-exposure the artists here attempt to both challenge notions of sexual liberation and also celebrate the liberation of female sexuality on social media. Feminist debate around Merritt's work based on its supposed display of sexual liberation frame the debates around Schrager's claim to be creating feminist intervention through the over exposure of her sexuality and Holland's claim to be denying sexual pleasure in her actions that are "not very sexy"(Holland, 2014).

As McRobbie states above under the label of 'new femininities' young women are performing sexuality online through postfeminist notions of empowerment and choice, however the type of performances are so aligned with pornography and the sex industry it is hard to see differences or how these performances empower without conforming to industry standard. Looking again towards Haraway's use of irony in the cyborg and Paasonen's proposal of ironic distance the works in this chapter are analysed in terms of their proximity to stereotypical representations of the submissive female subject of porn. In her book *Bad Objects*, Naomi Schor describes how the performance of irony must take its distance from the fetishisation of female subjects. Schor's analysis of feminist practices whose intentions are to distance themselves from the hands of the male fetishist must divorce themselves from fetishism, without this distance the "feminist ironist" plays back into the male fetishist hands (Schor, 1995, p.106).

Sexualisation

Robbie Duschinsky (2013) explores the term 'sexualisation' from the varied definitions provided by feminist theory and social policy. He explains that the term emerged as a portmanteau of the words 'sexual socialisation', coined by Graham Spanier (1975). "Spanier defined 'sexual socialisation', 'also referred to as sexualisation', as 'having three major components: development of a gender

identity; acquisition of sexual skills, knowledge, and values; and development of sexual attitudes or disposition to behave' (1975: 34–35)" (Duschinsky, 2013, p.258).

Following on from this definition he discusses how from 2003 the term 'sexualisation' was used in feminist debate on the sexist cultural representations of women in media and that this culture of sexualisation undermined "the confidence and social power of young girls" (ibid.). This comes from the American Psychological Association Task Force on the *Sexualization of Girls* and a report drawn up by the APA arguing that "'in the current environment', 'teen girls' are encouraged to 'look sexy' – though 'they know little about what it means to be sexual, to have sexual desires, and to make rational and responsible decisions' (2007: 3)" (Ibid., p.259). Duschinsky looks at the contradictory nature of the term 'sexualisation', as offering a description with which to analyse the exploitation of women's bodies as sexual objects and the analysis of self-produced images by young women that display choice or personal agency. In *Mainstreaming Sex, The Sexualisation of Western Culture* (2009), Feona Attwood explains how this report by the APA and other commentaries on the 'sexualisation' of culture is damaging and, "do not make use of the frameworks for examining sexuality, the media or culture that have been developed in academic work"(Attwood, 2009, p14).

The moral panic that is associated with the 'sexualisation' of young women's bodies "over-simplifies and obfuscates related concerns around girls, bodies, sex and sexuality in ways that flatten out social and cultural difference (see Duschinsky, 2010; Walkerdine, 1999)" (Renold & Ringrose (2011). This type of moral panic by sexualities scholars conceptualised as the "pornification of popular culture" nostalgically calls for a "return to the repressed sexual subjectivity of girls' presumed sexual innocence" (ibid, p.401). This type of blaming and shaming young women as either "savvy sexual agents or objectified sexualized victims", is too simple and feminist scholars must move beyond these binary positions "to see instead the complexity and difficulty in navigating and performing schizoid sexual subjectivities and female desire in our contemporary moment" (Renold and Ringrose, 2011, p.404). Rosalind Gill also dismisses the use of the word as she states:

They tend to homogenise, ignoring differences and obscuring the fact that different people are “sexualised” in different ways and with different meanings. Sexualisation does not operate outside of processes of gendering, racialisation, and classing, and works within a visual economy that remains profoundly ageist, (dis)ablist and heteronormative (Gill, 2009).

Situating this research within these studies shows how the position of the female body in our contemporary moment cannot be simply analysed as good or bad, right or wrong. Jane Juffer applies the term ‘the tired binaries’ to describe popular debates over sexualisation of culture and pornography as either “democratizing sexual discourse...or reducing sexual pleasure to commodified performance” (Juffer, cited in Attwood, 2009, p.11). This type of sexual shaming of young women who are either submissive or subversive relates to the theories of traditional femininity (submissive) vs. ‘new femininities’ (subversive). This also relates back to the double entanglement within postfeminist theories, where women use their bodies to express their personal sexual freedom to do so but these images fall back into objectified categories when they are used in an unintended way and have damaging repercussions. Rebecca Schneider talks of “binary terror” that happens when the threat of binaries collapsing or crossing over incur. She states that “when the word “art’ is flashed over the image “porn” binary terror is provoked (Schneider, 1997, p.14). As in her quote opening this chapter the framing of these images complicates binary assumptions and appropriate behaviour within specific social networks.

I discussed fourth wave feminism in Chapter Four and the works that are presented in these case studies have been categorised by some as fourth wave.⁸⁰ If looked at from this position, but without discounting postfeminist sensibilities as a critical object for investigation, we see how the subversive and critical possibilities of these practices drift in and out of criticality where feminist politics have become

⁸⁰ For instance in the 2015 documentary ‘The F word’ by Robert Adanto.

more complicated in the contemporary moment. Rosalind Gill's describes the complications with feminist analysis of this contemporary moment:

For the contemporary feminist analyst, the current moment—by which I mean variously, this year, this month, and right now—must rank as one of the most bewildering in the history of sexual politics. The more one looks, listens, and learns, the more complicated it seems. Whilst some choose to offer linear stories of progress or backlash, with their associated affects of hope or despair, for most the situation seems too complicated for such singular narratives: for every uplifting account of feminist activism, there is another of misogyny; for every feminist "win," an out-pouring of hate, ranging from sexual harassment to death threats against those involved; for every instance of feminist solidarity, another of vicious trolling (Gill, 2016, p.613).

Natacha Merritt

Natacha Merritt's photography was discovered by fetish photographer Eric Kroll through her website www.digitalgirly.com. Merritt's photographic work is an erotic insight into her sexual exploits taken with her digital camera whilst in the 'act', whether it is intercourse, masturbation or fellatio. Kroll, a well-known fetish publisher, published Merritt's works in a Taschen book titled *Digital Diaries* in 2000. Merritt's work is important to this research as it comes with many conflicting arguments that again go back to the issue of agency and control. Merritt took all the images herself⁸¹, from her point of view, or "at arms length" (Kroll, 2000) and in this way as with White's analysis of web cam girls she claimed control of the image. This claim of agency refers to the fact that a man did not produce the images, or for the male gaze. They were referred to in the book as Merritt's "self-explorations" (Kroll, 2000, p.9). However criticism of the book came from the fact

⁸¹ Although Merritt was not always the subject of the work, she claims to only be in about 30% of the images (Merritt, 2000).

that these images were being referred to as artworks, although Merritt never claimed to be an artist she does refer to them as works of art (Merritt, 2000). They were placed in the same field as the work of Cindy Sherman, Diane Arbus (Kroll, 2000, p.9) and Sarah Lucas (Grant, 2000). The issue at hand is the blatant alignment with the formal structures of pornographic imagery, and even with Merritt at the controls the images do not tend to show the woman in an empowered position. One image that draws criticism is of her performing a blowjob where we see Merritt's face in the act with a disembodied male, Merritt's gaze is not to the viewer but looking out of shot. The formalities of this image cause problems for the so-called empowerment Merritt is supposedly portraying as her non-confrontation implies lack of control or submission, a trope of submissive heterosexual pornography. However, Merritt has said that the reason she is not looking down the lens is that she is looking at the digital screen where she decides when to take the shot. In this way, Merritt is looking at herself in the act; using her camera as a mirror and a frame (Merritt, 2000). Kerstin Mey discusses the set-up of the images as "feigning, intimacy, innocence and naturalness" where the images "mobilise the 'convention of realism', as an event that happens in the real world"(Mey, 2007,p.117). Mey discredits the images as anything other than pornography and food for the male gaze. Similarly Catherine Grant's review of the book in *MAKE* finds difficulty in positioning these images within the art world.



Figure 68. Natacha Merritt, 2001, *natacha02._t/P0.66*

To conceive women's desire is to explore the interface of the body and discourse, acknowledging that desire acts as a process between sensuality and sentience well beyond the limits of normative heterosexist descriptions of 'woman' as the mute object of (masculine) desire (Meskimmon, 2003, p.94).

Is it possible then that Merritt *is* revealing female desire, *even if* the images produced are so aligned with those in pornography, who are we to question her sexual desires? In an interview for I-D magazine curator Alison Gingeras discusses the works of controversial artists Joan Semmel, Anita Steckel, Betty Tompkins, and Cosey Fanni Tutti who in the '70s were censored due to the provocative and highly sexual works by stating that "acknowledging heterosexual desire, that's really where the problem came in — which is ironic because that's the most normative thing in our society. Who would have thought that being a straight woman and articulating that subject position would be subversive?" (Newell-Hanson, 2016). Is this then the problem many have with Merritt: that although many of the images show her or others involved in lesbian sex, the images of her performing blowjobs looking away from the lens re-enforce the image of male dominance and do little to project an image of female empowerment? Mey claims that the silent medium of photography makes the depiction of female sexual pleasure difficult, where displaying male sexual satisfaction is easier due to the phallus, Merritt's images "display a standard diet of heterosexual porn" (Mey, 2007,p.120).

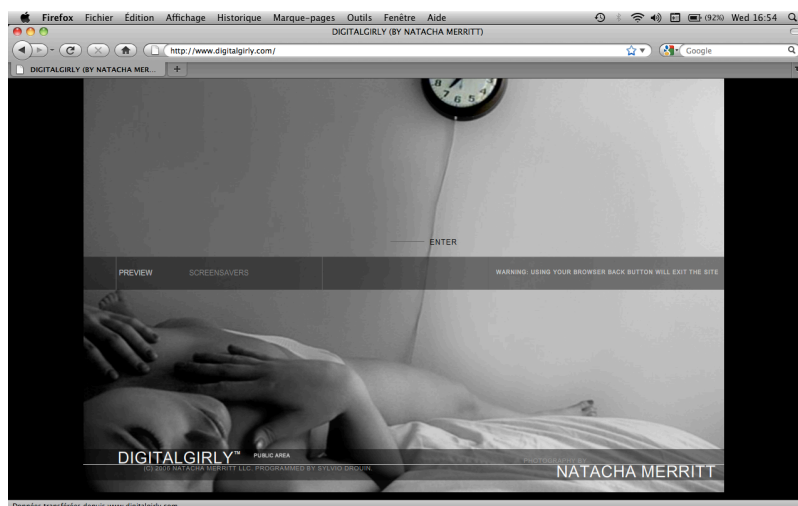


Figure 69. Natacha Merritt, “digital girly” homepage, screen grab.

Contexts shift through the production of a Taschen book of works that were originally posted online. Merritt does not state that these images were created for the Internet rather it was a world she was involved in and enjoyed and decided to document it with the new digital camera technology that was available and post them online. Merritt’s use of the Internet as the original space for displaying her photographs is more relevant to my research than their subsequent commercial incarnation in the form of the coffee table book. Gargett offers a Deleuzian way of thinking through Merritt’s ‘cyber-images’ that is less dismissive of their pornographic attributes and celebrates the images as forms of ‘becoming-woman’ that question and re-position “traditional images of the body in the post human condition” (Gargett, 2010 p.34). Through her use of the camera Gargett also declares that Merritt re-claims the camera as a tool of self-reinvention (Gargett, 2010, p.35), however Mey would argue that it is not self-knowledge that the work foregrounds but rather self-surveillance (Mey, 2007, p.118). Gargett claims Merritt is an artist even though she denied this title, but through defining these works as ‘art’ it seems to be classified outside of the realm of pornography; more “painting-like art” than “a simple extension of popular-porno/cultural forms” (Gargett, 2010, p.36). By representing ‘the feminine’ into the image of sexuality Gargett claims Merritt is uncovering and making visible the point of her exploitation produced by patriarchal masculinity. It should also be noted that Merritt does not discuss these works as feminist, she is interested in creating images from her personal perspective but the intention that was inherent in them was not a fully artistic or

politically charged one. However, that is not to say they don't have any power but they really only seemed to become 'art' when they were discovered by Eric Kroll and published by Taschen. There is something in their existence as digital images online that lets them exist as more than one thing; art, erotica, pornography, self-exploitation and sexual liberation. This is not exploitation, these images are self-produced and self-published, it seems that through their re-appropriation into the world of publishing and coffee table books by a well-known erotica publisher they begin to feel more like commodified 'sexualised' images of women. There is also a sense of a loss of agency when a man re-packages them. Specifically when in the essay at the start of the book we see how Kroll gave Merritt direction on what type of shots to shoot.

I'd give her hints as to where I thought she should look for the next model or where she should shoot the next model or what shots were missing. 'I think you need a close-up of someone's face while she or he is 'coming'. Off she'd go (Kroll, 2000, p.8).

Gargett is generous to Merritt's images, pulling from them a theoretical agency through a Deleuzian post-human framework where Merritt's *Digital Diaries* move beyond issues of representation and towards new 'becomings'. Gargett also references Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadism' to describe the new cybernetic female representation that occurs online, the woman is not image rather a process of redefinition, and through exploring the signifiers that code her 'woman' not through essentialism but by "following lines of flight through existing structures enacting disruptive actions" (Gargett, 2010, p.42).

Using terms such as 'reworking' or 'resignifying' female subjectivity through a liberated agency for Rosalind Gill illustrates that her predictions around postfeminism have come true. Gill is concerned that the 'turn to agency' reflects postfeminist claims where it is assumed that women's battles have been won, women are no longer seen as 'other' or objectified but are free to express their sexuality and sexual freedom without the fear of oppression, domination, injustice or inequality (Gill & Donaghue, 2013, p.248).

In quoting Judith Butler, Attwood states that agency is “located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition of norms” (Butler, 1990, p. 145) and conceptualized in terms of a “taking up of tools” “‘here the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tools lying there” (Butler, 1990, p. 145, in Attwood, 2011, p.11). This in a way echoes Gargett, in that we must look at women producers online as more than complying to a postfeminist ‘self-objectifying gaze’ or objects of a male gaze but to look at agency as a form of ‘making do’ that “exceeds the limitations within which it is necessarily produced, becoming a new way of doing femininity and making culture” (Attwood, 2011, p.13). Looking again at Paasonen’s description of common knowledge assumptions produced online as a presupposition of “what women are like” the self-produced nature of Merritt’s work suggests a reaction against these assumptions.

Implying agency is attained through the nature of self-produced images ignores how posting images online is perceived or how they are experienced by the spectator. Merritt’s works, although analysed as both submissive to dominant codes of objectification and as possessing cyborg status in their disruptive enacting invoke binary terrorism and revive questions around the classification of art vs. pornography. In classifying *Digital Diaries* as feminist art the works become critical readings or interrogations of the field. Merritt’s exploits into “self-realization” tend to imply a sense of agency, however it may be that the agency implied here is just that.

Leah Schrager

You are a genius for being the spokesperson for Naked Therapy. Woman’s naked body and its beauty is the most precious gift given to man, who, these days, in my opinion, does not deserve it. I want to thank you for all the good you’ve done me. I mean, after these two sessions I have no doubt that your “Naked Therapy” has a future. Be sure that you changed my life. Also, allow me to congratulate you for being SO sexy, having such an amazing rack and booty you’d turn on even a stone! (Schrager, 2017).

Duchamp said the urinal was art; I say I am art (Schrager, 2012).

Moving ten years on, Leah Schrager's work lies closely with Natacha Merritt's in that the line between object of mainstream pornography and sexual agency is blurred. It disregards this line completely in an act of binary terrorism. Schrager doesn't seem to be interested in authenticity as we see by her multiple alter egos online, or what she calls 'ona's'. Schrager's practice grew out of her career as a dancer. In her online bio Schrager claims that she felt a loss of control of her image when getting photographers to document her dancing, she had no rights or even control over how the images were created or distributed, this caused her to create "derivative works". These works created in 2012 are digitally altered images of the artist where the manipulation blurs, stretches or crops in order to disrupt the image of the body. The nature of these works are reminiscent of Carolee Schneeman's video 'Fuses', which was also highly criticised as being "too much", even for the avant garde audiences who claimed Schneeman was narcissistic (Schneider, 1993, p.76).

Schrager was also successful in erasing images of herself on Google search. She contacted publications and blogs to remove her image, this project spanning from 2010-2102 was called *Google Project Part 1(Removal)*. In *Google project Part 2 (the collective multiplication)* Schrager created a 'Google Flood' where she realised erasing herself was "insufficient", so she flooded the Internet with false information about herself to confuse and throw people off the scent of who the real Leah Schrager actually is. Schrager's practice takes on a multitude of different projects, all dealing with issues around female identity online and the parameters of agency women have when it comes to sexual self-representation. One of the main reasons Schrager created the Google projects was to conceal her actual identity as she performed her 'ona'-*Sarah White the Naked Therapist*.

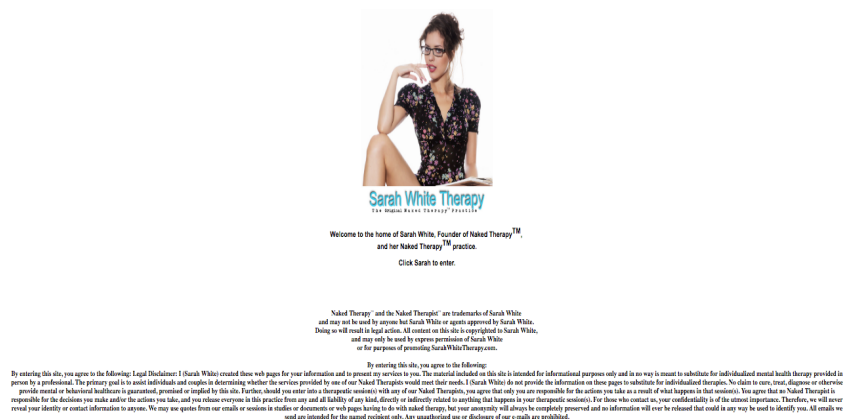


Figure 70. Leah Schrager, Sarah White Homepage.

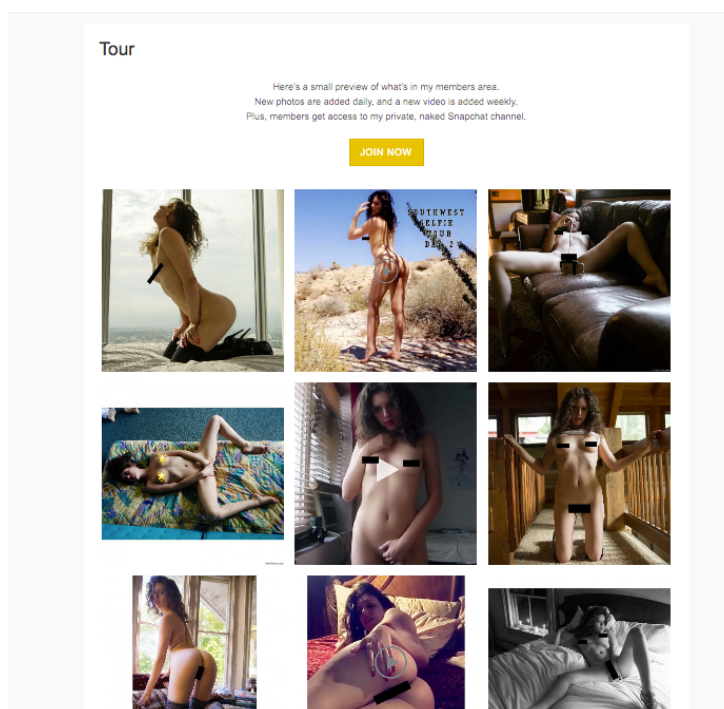


Figure 71. Leah Schrager, Onagram.

From 2010 Schrager performed the 'one' Sarah White, also called *The Naked Therapist*. In this work Sarah White has a website of images and videos of her naked therapy and descriptions, testimonials and FAQs. Naked Therapy is just that, originally open for both men and women but since 2012 is strictly men.

Schrager takes appointments at \$300 an hour. Naked Therapy is described as: “an experience that combines elements from positive and person-centered talk therapy, experimental therapy and creative play therapy, with the added component of the client and/or therapist getting naked to facilitate more inset and unique insights through the experience of arousal” (Schrage, 2017). Sarah White states that her Naked Therapy is treatment for men with ‘male hysteria’, drawing on the 19th century diagnosis for women with anxiety as ‘hysterical’ and curable through the experience of orgasm. White believes that her form of therapy helps men with unrealistic and dysfunctional relationships with sex and pornography to deal with treating women as both sexually desirable but also intelligent agents. White’s *Naked Therapy* is an attempt to give men a more healthy relationship to sex and their approach to sexual relationships with women.

The fact that Sarah White is an ‘one’ of Schrage’s and feeds her artistic practice makes it seem like this work is investigative as a way to explore how men view women and play with the dynamics of performing female sexuality through a webcam as a means to inform her art practice. The works that Schrage creates as a result of her experiences as Sarah White are abstracted and fragmented photo/painting self-portraits posted onto Instagram and printed and displayed in galleries. In these images Schrage is usually posed in lingerie or naked, she then uses paint and digital manipulation to fragment the image. Here we see Schrage engage with the familiar, pornographic pose but her abstraction is a disavowal of visual pleasure. Braidotti states of her “philosophy of as if” describing the practice of parody “not as a disavowal, but rather the affirmation of a subject that is both non-essentials that is to say no longer grounded in the idea of human or feminine ‘nature’, but she is nonetheless capable of ethic and moral agency” (Braidotti, 1996, p.4). Although Schrage would not consider her work as parody, the strategy of disavowal in the glitches and paint marks on her images suggest this is her aim with the work, however her affirmation of a subject is aligned with a pornographic model. Braidotti goes on to quote Butler in stating “the force of the parodic mode consists precisely in turning the practice of repetitions into a politically empowering position” (ibid). Schrager’s performances of *Naked Therapy* paid for

by men and her production of heterosexual desire also complicate the power relationships at play.



Figure 72. Leah Schrager, 2016, web image.



Figure 73. Leah Schrager, 2017, web image.

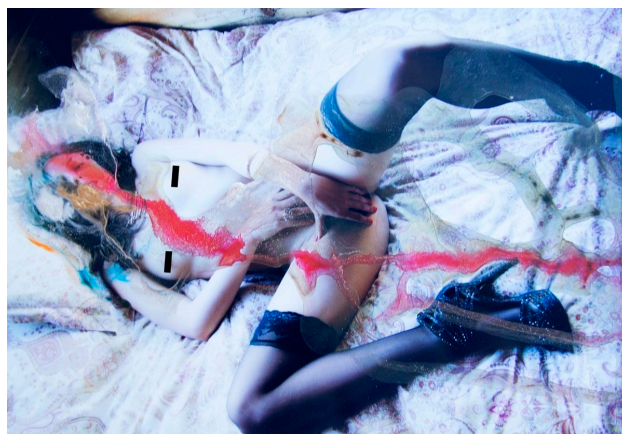


Figure 74. Leah Schrager, 2014, web image.

Similarly Schrager's most recent project of creating a celebrity online in an almost 'any means possible' fashion sees her explicitly engaged in pornography on social media. On her current pseudonym's 'Ona' Instagram page she offers viewers the option to get private nude pictures and similarly on Twitter where she tags porn sites in her posts to gain attention. Schrager states that in her work she is not authentically performing, rather she is performing authenticity; in this way Schrager is engaging in these acts to see how successful 'Ona' can be. Time will tell how the project will end, for now Schrager is engaged in performing a pornographic subject online that could be any amateur porn star.

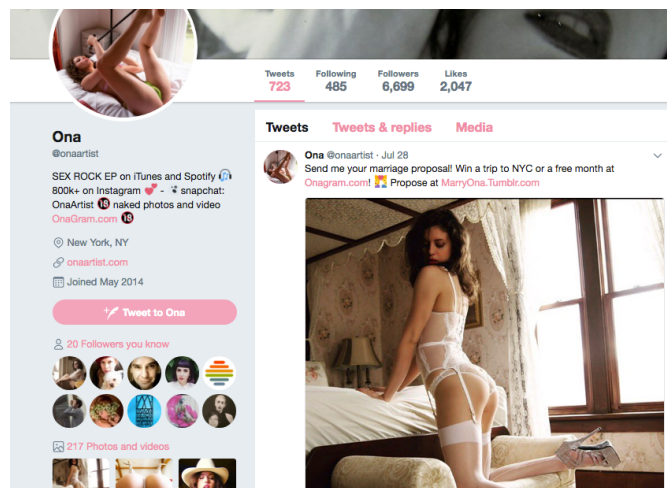


Figure 75. Leah Schrager, *Ona*, Twitter page, 2017.

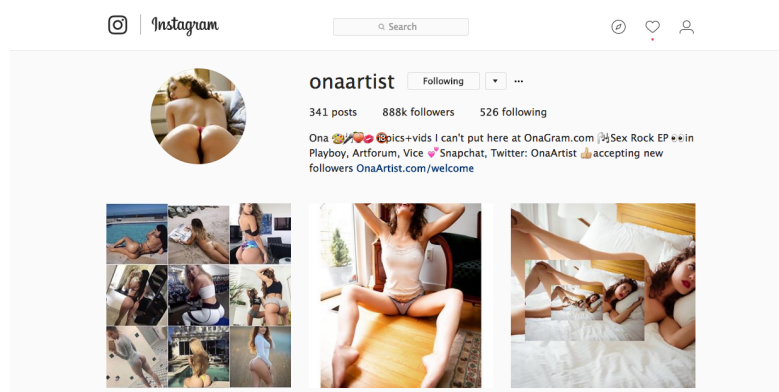


Figure 76. Leah Schrager, *Ona*, Instagram page, 2017.

The question when it comes to Schrager's practice of *Naked Therapy* and her *Ona* images is their value as art objects over their direct relationship to mainstream female-objectifying heterosexual pornography. This question is the binary terror Schrager uses as a tool and a similar argument to the previous discussion of Merritt's photography. Schrager is well aware of her position in the art world and the legacy of feminist artists such as Hannah Wilke and Carolee Schneeman who created work with their bodies and were vindicated by critics for creating narcissistic images less aligned with feminist politics and more inline with mainstream female representation and pornography. Schrager addresses the argument of narcissism and self-representation in her essay that accompanies an online exhibition she co-curated called *Body Anxiety*. In the essay Schrager calls women artists who use their bodies in their work 'female painters' described as "women artists who make visual art in which they mark (in some manner) on images (often manipulated) of their own body" (Schrager, 2015). Similarly Gargett describes Merritt's work as painting stating: "Merritt's work functions aesthetically as painting-like art, not as a simple extension of popular-porno/cultural forms" (Gargett, 2002, p.36). However, Schrager claims her move in to visual art was to gain agency she did not have as a dancer and model. Schrager's argument is that women who use their bodies as canvas and create paintings through digital manipulation or video are seen as narcissistic, only leaving room for women painters to be successful if they paint like men. However, male artists who paint women or even who take women's images off Instagram and reframe them as their own, as Richard Prince⁸² controversially does, can gain critical acclaim but a woman who uses her own body as image is reduced to narcissistic indulgence. This argument is seen throughout this thesis, not only in the case of the artists who challenge issues of representation, but in the moral panics around how young women should and shouldn't behave online. Narratives of sexualisation around the images young women post online seem to be unavoidable. Ultimately the fault is always directed at the woman who behaves in such a way and not the audience or viewers who are the ones most offended by such behaviour. Schrager's "female

⁸² This refers to Prince's work *New Portraits* where the artist makes comments under Instagram images and then prints the image and the comments onto large canvases. This work has been highly criticised and has raised issues around the ethics of using Instagram images where Prince has been in ongoing legal battles with photographers and models over his use of their images.

paintings” deny the viewer the full image of her body due to digital interruptions, distortion and the denial of visual pleasure. And as Wilke was in the past denied artistic merit Schrager’s work faces the same reception, but is Schrager just too close to fulfilling male fantasy to have critical distance?

Is it Art?

This question is close to Schrager as she was subject to exclusion from the West Chelsea Artists Open Studios (WCAOS) due to the promotional image she sent in after she had been accepted. Schrager proposed a performance in a hotel room, which would feature elements of her *Naked Therapy* the image she sent in for promotion, was considered advertising and not art. That Schrager makes money from her business as the *Naked Therapist* the curator claimed she was promoting her business rather than displaying her artwork. The controversy over this exclusion gained Schrager some media attention and she developed the performance in the same hotel independently of WCAOS where she invited discussion over the merit of her work as art or commerce. To say that her work as the *Naked Therapist* and her art practice are unrelated is untrue, although maybe not originally considered part of her practice Schrager claims this work has now come to inform her work. Schrager stated that the reason she was excluded was that she is: “a woman using the performative body provocatively and unironically inside and outside my art, because some in the art world have yet to recognise the realities and modalities of the 21st century in which the Internet deeply blurs the lines between self-promotion, commerce and art, because I am not yet a ‘famous’ (i.e. ‘Money famous’) artist” (Schrager, 2012). Schrager’s claim that the work is un-ironic troubles my attempt to read it as cyborgian. It troubles readings of it as subversive or critically feminist. Schrager’s work is more aligned with postfeminist sensibilities of agency and empowerment than feminist concerns of women’s bodies being objectified online. The use of her body in her therapy work and artwork are both serious and performed authentically, this is the same tone that is used in defence of Merritt’s works. However different to Merritt’s work is that Schrager positions her work in a feminist art context, and has been referred to as fourth wave due to its concerns with social media and female subjectivity online. In stating that the work is not ironic Schrager is referring to other works that use parody or are completely

acted out and separate to the artists' everyday life. However in her use of multiple 'onas' Schrager's subjectivity is fragmented, she is playing with subjectivity and the notion of multiple personalities and becoming Internet famous.

Researching Schrager online is somewhat overwhelming; there are numerous websites dedicated to her different 'onas'. Prior to her 'coming out' as *Sarah White*, Schrager used the website *artsexy.com* as a part fictional blog to discuss the themes and arguments within her work as an MFA student. Pulling quotes from Feona Attwood's essay *Through the looking glass* and referencing Mulvey, Berger and artists such as Wilke and Schneeman, Schrager's work appears to be well informed yet the images and the work she presents alongside these texts are still troubling. She discusses tutorials where professors dismiss her images and practice as it is "too close to reality", or that she is too beautiful or too "vanilla" (Schrager, 2016). Schrager also accuses critics of failing to see her work as a comment on the "realities and modalities" of 21st century Internet celebrity and self-promotion. Schrager combines the consumption of male desire with her art practice, she makes men pay to see her images and this transaction is what she is interested in when she discusses 'realities and modalities'. Her point also being that why is it ok for a male painter to paint or photograph a naked woman and it be art but when a woman paints or photographs herself she is narcissist or sex worker? The fact that the advert for Sarah White was refused entry to the WCAOS exhibition on the grounds that it was not art highlights a misunderstanding with Schrager's intention. But Schrager fails to differentiate the two practices and this is where her work becomes difficult to analyse.

Schrager's work certainly draws attention to the politics of subjectivity within the production of images of women online. In her taking control of her own sexuality and body as object of sexual desire and creating the painterly interventions she plays with the perceived notion of woman as object of the male gaze. However the work is at risk of "playing into the hands of the male fetishist" (Schor, 1995, p.106) and that through her denial of irony there is a lack of criticality in the work. In Braidotti's use of Irigaray's mimesis strategy, she claims the ironic mode of mimesis to be "politically empowering because it addresses simultaneously issues of identity, identifications and political subjectivity. The

ironical mode is an orchestrated form of provocation and, as such, it marks a sort of symbolic violence" (Braidotti, 1996, p.4).

Feona Attwood claims that there *is* agency within online pornography she discusses a new way of doing 'feminine sexuality' through the many forms of pornography where women are in control of their bodies and where camgirls "insist on the presentation of a sexual self which is firmly located within the context of their lives, relationships and politics" and do not conform to standards of sexual beauty such as hairless bodies. Attwood positions contemporary studies of sex and the media in a "profoundly contradictory context" stating that:

The renewed interest around the world in finding ways of restricting and policing media use sits oddly with the widespread view that we now live in an 'anything goes' world of sex where culture has been 'pornified' and its regulation has become impossible (Attwood, 2011, p.17).

Whilst I can see Schrager's point and feel her practice contributes to understanding notions of female subjectivity online, I can't help but come back to the unironic reinforcement of heteronormative female sexuality servicing male desire. Her lack of ironic distance places the work alongside self-made pornographic images and although has agency in having the right to display her own sexual desire, as a feminist statement it lacks criticality of a platform that privileges white heteronormative female sexuality.

Faith Holland's *Porn Interventions*

"Critical, strange and not very sexy" is how artist Faith Holland describes her online practice (Holland, 2014). Holland uses her own body, her computer webcam and porn tube sites as the material in her works. Holland's sexually suggestive videos or 'Porn Interventions' are posted on to porn sites such as redtube.com. Sites such as redtube enable home producers of porn to upload their videos and there are community pages and blogs for discussion. These sites are not dissimilar to mainstream social media sites, and as such have been termed porn 2.0.



Figure 76. Faith Holland, *Porn Interventions 'clit cam'*, 2014.

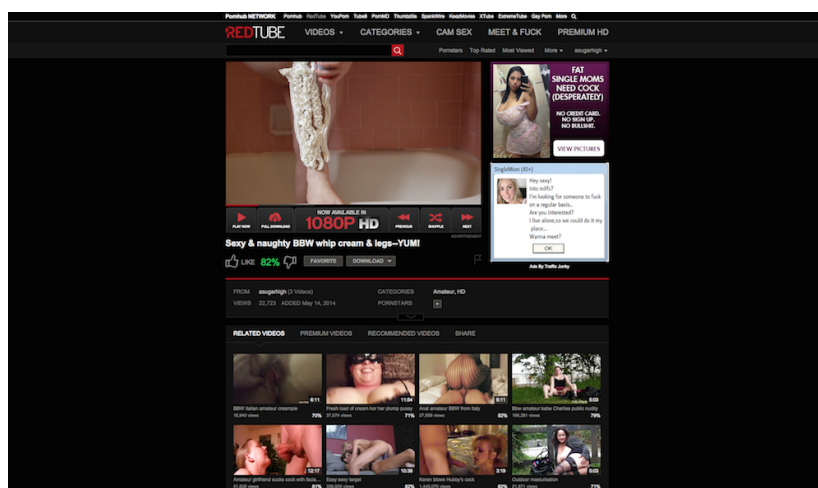


Figure 77. Faith Holland, *Porn Interventions 'shaving cream on redtube'*, 2014.

Holland's videos invite a sleazy spectatorship however fail to deliver on their promise. In the video *Lick, Suck, Screen 2* (which is titled *Hot BBW licks & sucks MMM sticky delicious*, on RedTube), viewers are lured in by the suggestiveness of its title. Holland begins by smiling to the webcam, we only see her head and shoulders, she then takes off her t-shirt and bra exposing her unshaved armpits, she covers the lens as she approaches the camera, to hide exposing her breasts, she then spends around 30 seconds licking and sucking the lens and the video cuts to the end. In *Hot Camgirl plays with Clit*, 2014, similarly the image is blurred as if Holland is fingering the lens, she groans in the way women do in porn simulating a climax and then slowing down again. The videos

are only viewable online, either on Holland's website, or on the actual porn site and she calls them 'site specific'. They are also screen recordings of the porn site, so even if you don't click on the porn site link you still have to view the pornographic pop-up adverts that surround the video. In order to view the work you must engage with the porn site also.

These online performances to webcam in feminist art practice draw on cam-girl culture, the Internet is flooded with cam-girls, performing sex acts to camera live for men around the world, from their bedrooms and sometimes from communal houses where this work is exploited⁸³. Web cam sites and ProAm porn sites have become massive industries since the rise of Web 2.0 where the ability to self-produce and distribute porn is easy on sites such as RedTube and YouPorn extending the term web 2.0 to pornography sites, or Porn 2.0. In terms of the agency of these performers many commentators claim that these women performing to camera to pleasure men sexually are in a place of power as they have control over what the viewer sees, and they earn money whilst doing it. Bleakley (2014) describes camgirls as entrepreneurs in their subversion of the stereotypical view that pornography exploits women; he describes this new sexual entrepreneurship as a "revolutionary form of sexual feminism" (p.893). The site that Holland uploaded her videos to is not just as camgirl site, but one where people can upload their porn videos, some more amateur than others.

The spectators of Holland's work vary between porn site goers and the artist's followers and the viewing experience is different for both. Holland uses the video titles to invite the porn viewer to click suggesting some sexual entertainment where they are ultimately disappointed (or so we assume). In chapter two I referred to Victor Burgin's thoughts on "fundamental law of the eroticisation of absence" where he uses Barthes' psychoanalytic readings of intermittence as erotic, where the flash of skin seduces rather than the complete erotic experience of a strip (Burgin, 2000, p.86). Michele White also states that fragmented images from

⁸³ In Romania and Colombia sexcam studios have become popular. In these large buildings rooms are created to mimic bedrooms where camgirls come in and work shifts.

webcams “offer a possible site of resistance to this dualistic structure of looking”, comparing visual pleasure in cinema, the webcam operator can play with distance and space to interrupt visual pleasure, as can the distance and viewing conditions of the spectator. This style of video art is not new, looking back to the 1960s artists like Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci and Carolee Schneemann were making works that displayed the body as distorted and fragmented. Within screen theory discussions around distance between screen and spectator dictate how one experiences the subject on-screen. Christian Metz argues that in order for the voyeur to engage with voyeuristic desire there must be distance between the object of vision and the spectator. However these systems of vision have been overcome due to mobile screens and digital technology the over-presence of the woman on screen as described by Mary Anne Doane still affects the female spectator (Doane, 1982, p.78). Whether there is voyeuristic space or not, the body of the woman on screen reflects onto the body of the woman spectator. Amelia Jones labels these screens in works where the body is pressed against the screen as a ‘flesh screen’⁸⁴ such as in Pipilotti Rist’s ‘parafeminist’ work *Open my Glade* 2000 where Rist pressed her face against a pane of glass in the camera making it seem like her face was about to come out of the screen. This work was screened in Times Square, New York on a medium used for advertising and where stereotypical images of female models are usually seen. Rist’s interruption to these broadcasts, Jones explains, “articulates a parafeminist⁸⁵ subject, who is not afraid of being an image because she knows the image is flesh of the world. It can never be fully attained” (Jones, 2006, p.228). In a similar way to Rist’s infiltration of the network of the Times Square boards, Holland attempts to obstruct any attainment of the body as it encompasses the “flesh screen” of the porn spectator.

⁸⁴ Jones refers to Rist’s work as an articulation of Maurice Merleau Ponty’s “flesh as substance of the world, substantiating our bodies as human”. In this sense the screen becomes flesh. (2006, p.220).

⁸⁵ Jones uses the term parafeminist as a way out of describing Rist’s work as postfeminist in the sense that it does not exist after feminism but “side by side” feminism. She also states that what makes Rist’s work different from our assumptions of feminist work is that it does not aim to challenge male gaze positions; or, represent “bad girl feminism” which embraced its own “commodified forms of feminine misbehaviour” (2006, p.214).



Figure 78. Pipilotti Rist, *I'm not the girl who misses much*, 1986, video still
7:46 min, video.

Holland's strategy of suspending the climax and the denying the spectator full engagement with the body on screen is similar in ways to Rist's 1986 video work *I'm not the girl that misses much*⁸⁶ in that it promises the female body but through lens distortion disallows the spectator to fully receive that image. The two works also refer to a kind of hysteric woman, the visible body hair on Holland's body in *Lick, Suck, Screen 2* and the possessed dance of Rist both obscure the male gaze. Rist's work displays this style explicitly as she plays with the screen and the body. The difference with these works and Holland's is that the conditions of viewing are explicitly different. Not only are you looking at the body pressed against the screen or licking the camera lens you are surrounded by videos, gifs and images of porn, placing the spectator in a compromising and possibly uncomfortable position.

Subversive Acts

The agency in images of women or the performance of women on screens has been seen as something produced and consumed by men, Rebecca Schneider states that "the body marked female has signified the feminized realm of

⁸⁶ In this work a female figure dances and sings hysterically to the Beatles song *Happiness is a Warm Gun*. The video is blurry and interrupted through glitches and digital manipulation.

representation, and the obsessive representation of woman in terms of desirability has served to inscribe the agency of the representer as masculine”(Schneider, 1997, p.51).

In Chapter Two I talked about Butler’s theory of subversive repetition where she discussed the sight of the transvestite on stage causing pleasure but the same transvestite in public causing anger; the space of the theatre being a safe space to perform such an act and possibly not so subversive as it is performed in the theatre and not ‘real life’. In a similar way the gallery legitimises the performance of female sexuality as it is framed within the institution compared to using a platform such as Instagram or a porn tube site and engaging in similar acts of representation that become categorised as pornographic.

The blurring of such boundaries or ‘binary terrorism’ in the works of Schrager and Holland highlight the artist’s concerns with the representation of women online. It is also difficult to look at these works as either subversive or submissive for both artists use self-made videos and images on platforms that encourage self-made videos and images as forms of expression. Schrager attempts to over-expose female sexuality in her images and as such contributes to the images of white female sexuality on Instagram. In her ‘female painting’ she interrupts the visual pleasure associated with looking at her body. Holland creates non-pornographic videos for pornographic websites; her interruptions are site specific and must be experienced on porn sites. This positioning the art spectator where they must access porn to see the work is a clever way of controlling how the work is experienced. But by going to the site the spectator engages in building traffic for the website, this could be seen as support for the website rather than engaging with art. For the porn spectator the disappointment created in Holland’s videos work to deny visual pleasure and stop the viewer in their tracks. Although it may be difficult to know how effective these videos are as there are so many videos on these sites the viewer can simply click onto the next.

These works aim to de-essentialise the coded female body through repetitive subversive acts which is difficult to do on such an open space and as Butler states:

The prescription is invariably more difficult, if only because we need to think a world in which acts, gestures, the visual body, the clothed body, the various physical attributes usually associated with gender, *express nothing* (Butler, 1988, p.530).

These subversive acts ultimately aim to transform the coded sexualized female body, however in this subversive performance it is important for us to perform and represent as woman. Butler goes on to state:

Certainly it remains critically important to represent women, but to do that in a way that does not distort and reify the very collectivity the theory is supposed to emancipate”(Butler, 1988, p.530).

Female artists must perform these repetitive acts as a strategy to expose the construction of what Amy Shields Dobson terms hetero-sexy femininity on the social networks that try to construct and control the types of acceptable female bodies on display. The works discussed have been created to challenge misrepresentations of bodies that are coded female in visual culture, whether it is in mainstream culture, pornographic imagery or on Instagram, strategies of subversive performance in feminist art practice haven't changed much since the 1970s but the medium of representation has, and that is the complicated challenge for contemporary feminist artists today.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to explore whether agency is possible in online performances where female sexuality is celebrated or in instances of intervention pornographic social networks. Opening the chapter I discussed the

debate around the feminist intentions of Natacha Merritt's online works. I examined two contemporary practices that use online intervention and self-produced sexualised imagery as feminist strategies. These works were framed around the debates of agency seen in the earlier works of Natacha Merritt. Merritt's work depicts a time pre-social media, however her images were self-produced as was the website that she shared them on. In this way Merritt displays agency in the fact that her work was personally created. Feminist debate that ensued centred on the publication of Merritt's work as both erotic and feminist art. Presenting pornography was one thing but re-framing the works and aligning them with great women artists caused a debate as to their legitimacy⁸⁷.

Merritt's work created conflicting arguments as to its value as an art object and the criticality of the work from a feminist perspective. Although Merritt didn't claim the work to be feminist or art it has found its way into feminist art criticism mostly through its publication as an erotic Taschen book. The arguments around Merritt's work revolve around its re-enforcing of male gaze politics and the objectification of women by men, even when the images are produced by the female performer. Leah Schrager's works move in-between the world of online sex work and the art-world and due to these shifts her work has been dismissed by the art world. Schrager approaches female subjectivity online through a number of different personas in a strategy to dissolve notions of authenticity and to mask her identity as naked-therapist for men 'Sarah White'. The conflicting messages Schrager's work sends out has caused her exclusion from exhibitions and in this Schrager is highlighting how the artworld is in someway not sure how to deal with her work.

Context is important in the making and displaying of these works. It could be said that the gallery is insufficient in the displaying of works that are attempting to interrupt the networks of domination online. The works in this chapter use these

⁸⁷ Merritt's work was included in the book *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century*, Grosenick, Uta, ed. 2001, Köln: Taschen.

online spaces to interrogate how women are viewed in their self-produced sexual imagery. The problem for these works is that they either get lost amongst other similar images or they are not taken seriously as feminist artworks. The exhibition of Schrager's images in the gallery tend to re-present what is seen online and as in the presentation of Ulman's images fail to engage the spectator any further than their position of looking at a framed image on the gallery wall. Holland's interventions achieve criticality in how they force the spectator to engage with the platform online however in terms of interrupting the flow of clicking in the actions of the porn spectator the nature of viewing these videos on porn tube sites is to click on to the next.

In his book *Zero Comments* Geert Lovink talks about the power of new media art that "at its best, communicates the underlying premises, and glitches, of the network gadgets we use day and night. Without such critical knowledge, we merely float around in the collective unconscious of the media sphere" (Lovink, 2008, p.81). All the works in this chapter have their place, some are more critical than others, and their value is difficult to prove as the artists do not always partake in gallery based works or tangible works. As young white women online performing with and through their bodies they are marked before they begin, however through glitches, masochism, being too close or website specific the artists create conditions of viewing that question notions of acceptable and appropriate bodies. Schneider states that "When placed within the formalized trajectory of the art canon, the explicitly "inappropriate" contents can be read relative to historically "appropriate" contents, raising provocative questions"(Schneider, 1997, p.15). This brings back the notion of the frame dictating the image rather than the image dictating what's perceived. However it is arguable that the works in this chapter get the opposite reaction than the Mapplethorpe example given earlier. The fact that they have been produced on the same stage as pornographic and sexualised images they are in some ways refused status in the art-world, and for them to be treated as art objects they must prove their criticality which gets lost within the frames of social networks.

In addressing these issues I sought to display works made online in a way that engaged the spectator further. For me, simply displaying video and images on a wall seems an insufficient method of installation given the importance of the spectator in these pieces. Reflecting back onto the spectator is important and viewing should be embodied rather than passive. In Chapter Six and in Appendix A I go further into how I dealt with the installation of my online works in a way that created a more haptic and embodied type of viewing.

CHAPTER SIX

Performing the Postfeminist Subject in my Art Practice

The pursuit and practice of trying to attain the unattainable, which is never meant to be, nor can it be, achieved, is what creates desire and regulates women's behaviour (Deliovsky, 2008, p.53).

The compounding of Signal with materiality suggests that new technologies will instantiate new models of signification. Information technologies do more than change modes of text production, storage, and dissemination. They fundamentally alter the relation of Signified to Signifier (Hayles, 1999, p.29).

In this chapter I take an in-depth look my practice element of this research. Throughout the thesis I have analysed the representation of postfeminist subjectivities in digital everyday and in art practices that perform digital subjectivities. Two case study chapters looked at how fourth wave feminist artists have taken postfeminist subjectivities or 'new femininities' and performed them as social media subjects. Chapter Four focused on youth and beauty as a signifier of 'new femininities' and the performance of this subject on social media by artists. Chapter Five took hyper-sexual agency as its starting point and analysed art practices that challenged just what it meant to have agency as a producer of sexual digital content on social media when the Internet is saturated with pornography. Each practice was analysed in terms of subjectivity and also in how the work was experienced. In order to challenge these structures artists must work within them but there must be difference, a change, an element of the work

that considers spectator experience, as ultimately these works are about being looked at or what Marsha Meskimmon terms "the scopic objectification of women" (2003, p.72). Haraway's conception of the cyborg as a subject that interrupts the flow of information in an effort to challenge stereotypical notions of gender, 'race' and class was used as a theoretical underpinning. In analysing art practices online I sought out instances of subversion that interrupted these flows and representations. The challenge the artists in this research faced is that their image as hetero-normative white women meant that challenging systems of oppression from within re-asserts this traditional marker of femininity as a 'norm'. As I explained in Chapter Two, visibility on social media makes it difficult to escape the codes implied by our bodies. We are not separate from our online interactions and our bodies are implicated and affected by online interactions. Braidotti considers the body an "interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) Are inscribed"(2002, p.25). She goes on to state how this body for Simone de Beauvoir was one's primary 'situation', is now a "situated self...an embodied positioning of the self"(ibid). Social networks such as Instagram also regulate the types of bodies they deem as appropriate, this means removing pictures of women with unsightly body hair, excess fat or menstrual blood. These practices highlight how femininity and female bodies are regulated through stereotypical norms, implying that control within these spaces is impossible due to the social codes that dominate. Using Judith Butler's theories on subversive repetition as a performance that exposes the systems of categorisation and that work to subvert these systems through performing difference such as drag, I considered how online practices could perform gender differently in a way that could challenge common knowledge assumptions of female subjectivity. From my research into these online practices I highlighted how the experience of the works from the spectator's position is one that artists must focus on if the works are to have subversive effects.

My practice takes this line of thinking, as a young white middle class woman my body is inscribed with meaning and the way I present my image highly codes how I want to be perceived. Not only do these material appearances affect my subjectivity but also the networked presentation of my image on social media adds to perceptions of self and where I place myself is revealing of my own self-perception. In my personal life my existence on social media is fairly basic, however, even limited use of social media in terms of posting selfies has an effect on my perception of myself. I curate my image online in how I want to be seen. In this work I was interested in performing a character that is produced and curated through a postfeminist lens, and who emulates 'new femininities' as investigated throughout this thesis. The aim of this investigation was to create a work that considered how the temporal and contextual nature of posting images and performing online could impact the spectator. Or how as Katherine Hayles has stated above, I could fundamentally alter relations between the signified and signifier. Throughout this thesis I have addressed practices and theories that use various strategies to interrupt or highlight the ways in which online social spaces regulate the types of female performances that are deemed acceptable or appropriate. I have shown how algorithms and social media regulators favour performances of femininity that stay in between the lines of mainstream beauty and sexuality, and how those who don't become invisible. The works in this chapter explore how I attempted to create interventions online and in the gallery through live streaming and the use of green screen technology. In the previous chapters I looked at how works are created online and then re-produced for the gallery. It was my intention in the practice element of this research to experiment with different forms of spectatorship that mirrored and also heightened the experience of viewing women and the performance of postfeminist female subjectivity online.

SweetHeart

I created the online alter ego SweetHeart as an ironic subject. The rhetorical act in naming the subject SweetHeart draws on the notion of Butler's theories of resignification whereby using an injurious term can become disjointed from its original meaning "opening up the possibility of agency" (Butler, 1996, p.15). I was interested in using the systems of address on social networks in a rhetorical exchange where they name me, or call me SweetHeart. In taking the name SweetHeart I was thinking about online assumptions of gender and 'race'. White (2001, p.26) discusses the profiling of individuals where one must choose a category of signification when setting up online accounts such as male and female and through this what Paasonen terms "common knowledge" assumptions occur. In her essay *The Technology of Gender* Teresa DeLauretis (1987, p.12) asserts that by ticking the box beside the letter F on an application form that that F "sticks to us like a wet silk dress".



Figure 79. SweetHeart's twitter welcome message screen-printed onto silk dress

In terms of processes of identification there have been changes to gender options on many social media sign ups⁸⁸ but many only give male and female options and through this the user is gendered accordingly. Throughout this

⁸⁸ For instance Facebook has 71 different gender options, Instagram offers a 'not specified' option alongside male and female.

thesis I have engaged with contemporary notions of female subjectivity under the umbrella of postfeminist 'new femininities'. I have shown how these femininities can be subversive towards traditional notions of femininity, however I have also shown how these 'new' subjectivities are performed online and how many online spaces work to regulate appropriate performances of female subjectivity. Concepts of authenticity and being 'real' are called into question where being yourself equates to performing the self on multiple platforms and within the codes and confines of those platforms.

SweetHeart was created as an experiment in the work. Drawing on the chapter's opening quotes my work looks at the pursuit of attaining and maintaining an image whilst also attempting to play with technology, altering relations to bodies on screen. I was interested in how participating in this culture could inform my work. SweetHeart is therefore an example of what Braidotti terms the virtual feminine in that I am performing her from a position of exploitation in order to work through how this subject could actually become empowered. Braidotti (2003, p.51) states that "one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted control over...in order to announce the death of the subject, one must first have gained the right to speak as one." SweetHeart embodies a type of subject that I do not necessarily wish to be in my personal life but that I am encouraged to aspire to, she is a subject that tries to conform within the structures of new femininity through my body. As a young woman I am encouraged to preserve my youthful appearance, keep in shape, eat healthy and look good, however I am unable to perform in this role and my inability to become this subject in my real life is mirrored in the SweetHeart performances. She is a product and she is failing in a culture where failing to keep slim, young and fit signifies a 'flawed self' (Featherstone, 2010: 195), mirroring my inability to conform to social norms of white hetero-normative beauty. Through SweetHeart my aim was to perform online on Instagram, YouTube and Twitter to create moments of failure as a strategy of subversion. Through experimentation in the studio and performing online I developed a piece of work that could be disruptive both through the experience of

the work as a digital piece and the body performing live simultaneously. The aim with this was to consider the experience of this subjectivity as one that is in conversation with the platform it is presented on and the physical performance. This multilayered performance sought to embody multiple subjectivities and to embody notions of Braidotti's virtual feminine testing out the theory as a possible mode of subversion.

Further to the performance of subjectivity, these works sought to explore how subversions could occur through viewing these works when the viewing of internet-based material is temporal and context based. The resulting work involved using video production techniques of green screen and performing live through online streaming as ways of producing images that were unpredictable and in that sense were open to the possibility of failure. The intention of the work was to position the spectator in-between states. Expanding on the theoretical work on screen-based artworks and installations by Mondloch (2010), Jones (2006), and Krauss (1976), this chapter engages in the work of art created on and through the screen-based platform of social media. Using a number of strategies and studio experiments I worked towards creating an interactive gallery-based practice that exposed constructions of female subjectivity that are both constructed through performing the body and also controlled by the nature of the social media frames themselves. In these works I attempted to situate the spectators in a position where their bodies are made complicit in the viewing. Theories on control and agency run through this thesis and are argued through examples of how women performing online achieve or fail to achieve these modes of empowerment. The complex debate around modes of empowerment and agency is brought into the practice; I work through these ideas to create new forms of viewing female subjects online that reflect back onto the spectator. These context-based, temporal performances attempt to contribute to the theoretical and art-practice field of analysing social media based practices and performances by considering how the works are experienced both in the gallery and online.

The process of making work in this PhD journey has been challenging. I began the research with a number of questions:

- What methods do women artists use when attempting to subvert contemporary stereotypes of femininity seen in the self-produced images of young women online?
- What are the implications of using the Internet as a site within these subversive art practices?
- What methods could be employed (in art practice) to more successfully subvert the screen as a site of digital everyday performance?

It was important for me to get answers to these questions, but also to create a body of work that critically addressed these issues, not simply as a way to illustrate the research. My work always starts with an action and a camera. I think about the action that I am interested in and I perform it repetitively. I use repetition and duration in my work as a strategy of subversion referencing Judith Butler's theories on subversive repetition as a form of agency in that it is "located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition of norms" (Butler, 1990, p.145). The actions I perform are always drawn from practices of female body maintenance or norms of feminine beauty, such as smiling (nice/compliant girl) or sit-ups (fit girl). Moving away from the static camera on tripod the work required that I experiment with smart phones, iPads and my laptop camera.

Selfie Videos

Beginning by working through the technology, I created a number of studio experiments that were informed by ideas around framing and the self-produced image. I focused on the selfie as a starting point and considered the image of the body created through the selfie and the impossible task of photographing the whole body at arms length. I took the phrase "Have it All" as a play on the notion that through viewing the body on screen there is some kind of possessive spectatorship. As when using the smart phone at arms length the body cannot be completely captured so the spectator cannot see it all never mind have it all.

However this cutting up of the body into parts can also encourage fetishistic spectatorship. This term also referring to the notion of how women “can have it all” in terms of balancing career and motherhood (Szala, 2015). The rhetorical nature of this term is deliberately used to mimic a postfeminist language used in clothing for women. I am particularly interested in this clothing as a signifier of postfeminist ideology, where messages of empowerment and sexual agency are entangled with notions of hetero-normative feminine beauty.



Figure 80. Laura O'Connor, *SweetHeart, All about the bass and serious shopping*, 2015. Web image.



Figure 81. Primark Leotard, an example of “hetero-sexy” clothing.

These types of clothing where printed text demands attention such as the large font 'INTERESTED' on the leotard in Figure 81 but on closer inspection the message states "not INTERESTED at all" ultimately asking to be ignored lies in the confusing messages produced within the subjectivity of my investigation. This message of "I can do what I want and it's just for me but I want you to read it and also check me out" typifies the postfeminist double entanglement and displays what Amy Shields Dobson terms "hetero-sexy". Dobson describes the hetero-sexy subject as a young woman who depicts herself as 'laddish', 'sexy', 'wild' and that she is "often framed for viewers by mottos of self-descriptive texts proclaiming confidence, and dismissing the potential criticisms or judgements of viewers on the basis of autonomy and self-acceptance" (Shields Dobson, 2014, p.98). This form of proclaiming sexual agency by summoning to be looked at as sexually 'up for it' highlights the contradictory messages of the postfeminist rhetoric. Similarly in Figure 81 on a post on SweetHeart's Instagram I wear a t-shirt that has a line from a pop song *All about the bass* where the letters have been used to read: "All about boys and serious shopping".



Figure 82. Fragmented image of body used for inspiration on Instagram

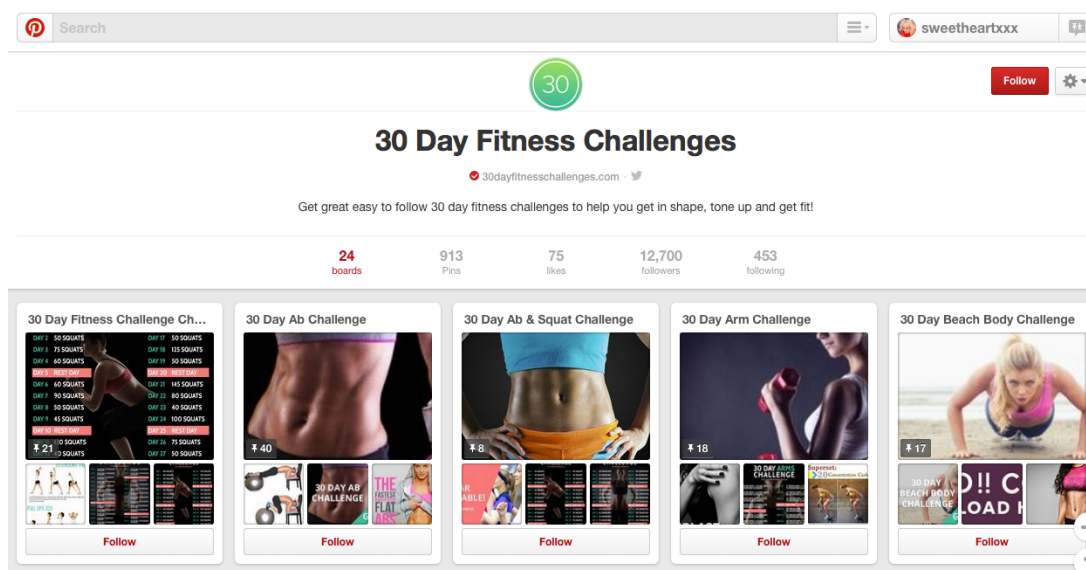


Figure 83. 30-Day challenge on Pinterest.

This work was also informed by notions of controlling the spectators gaze in the work of cam girls where spectators and performers bodies are “too close to see” or technical glitches interrupt visual pleasure and bodies are fragmented (White, 2003; 2006). The disembodied self-produced images of women’s bodies in the 30-day squat challenge trend where women document their progress by posting before and after pictures to their social media pages also informed the production of these works (Figures 80 & 81). These images, although created by and for women to monitor their progress also mirror images from advertising where the body is cut up in to pieces where its parts are fetishised. The image of the dismembered or cropped female body has been used in advertising where the body part becomes part of a fetish commodity. Gillian Dyer discusses how in advertising a woman is often represented by bits of her body that signify commodities such as lipstick or tights, etc., suggesting women are also commodities (1982, p.99). Attwood claims that in the nineties advertisers engaged in commodity feminism where the image of an empowered woman such as model Eva Herzigova in the Wonderbra advert *Hello Boys* plays knowingly with her sexual agency (Attwood, 2009, p.97). This ‘knowingness’ informed the empowerment politics of women’s self-representations. On the display of the midriff in self-produced images Attwood claims that rather than in the 1950s where a woman’s

clean house was the marker of success in the labour economy, the “suitably toned, conditioned, waxed, moisturised, scented and attired” midriff has now become a marker for success”(ibid, p.99). The postfeminist use of the midriff as a marker of female success in contemporary media works to place women back to self-objectifying their bodies. This type of empowered gaze works to validate self-surveillance as it is marketed as ‘not for men’ but for ‘me’. These before and after images of body maintenance act as markers of success where women are doing it for themselves, as the contradictory hetero-sexy text in the t-shirt above states she is “not INTERESTED at all” in performing for anyone else.



Figure 84. Laura O'Connor, *Have it All*, 2014, still digital image.

Drawing on the figure of the hetero-sexy subject I created a pair of knickers that had the words ‘have it all’ on them (Figure 82). I worked through a number of ideas for performing to camera and notions of public and private space and the nature of those contexts when creating online content. I filmed myself in clothes shop changing rooms taking selfie videos, these videos took on similar strategies of duration and repetition that runs through my practice however the quality of production was much lower due to the nature of the technology. Taking these videos off my phone and on to my computer I worked through ways of presenting them online that in some way moved beyond the standard modes of viewing.

Haptic Visuality: 'Tapping' and 'grabbing'

Terri Senft describes online viewing of camgirls through forms of "grabbing", where it occurs differently in each "stage of production, consumption, interpretation, and circulation"(Senft, 2008, p.46). As the viewer can screen grab the image of the performer it is impossible to have complete control over what happens to one's image. She states that the type of interactive viewing of selfies is more inline with grabbing which "signifies multiple acts: to touch, to seize for a moment, to capture attention, and to leave open to interpretation (as in the saying, "up for grabs"), raising questions of agency, permission, and power" (Senft, 2008, p.46). Aligning this notion to Marxist theories of commodity fetishism, Senft discusses how images of webcammers are "consumed" by spectators as opposed to simply "voyeuristic gazing" (ibid).

Further to Senft's work on grabbing I propose the word 'tap' to pertain to the same physical relationship with the body onscreen. Although tapping doesn't involve taking pictures of the screen, the act of tapping and the use of the phrase 'tap that' online exhibits this notion of commodity fetishism associated with the woman's body where physical language is used to describe her body. The phrase "I'd tap that" appears on social media generally in comments of images of women. The Facebook page 'Tap That' has 61,936 likes and there are hundreds of images of mainly white stereotypically sexy women in lingerie or swimwear followed by degrading comments.

Amelia Jones refers to the video artist's body that "exploits the intimate texture of the video, television, or computer monitor" as a "televisual body"(Jones, 2006, p.138). Laura U.Marks uses the term "haptic viscosity" "in watching video art works that incite a mutual relationship between the body of the viewer and the body on screen (Marks, 1998). Following on from Vivian Sobchack, Marks states "haptic images are erotic regardless of their content, because they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image" (Marks, 1998, p341). The works created here invite both a form of haptic viscosity in the

presentation of the televisual body but also invite a physical relationship that plays on the physical language used in postfeminist self-images.

In *Death 24 Times a Second* Laura Mulvey discusses active viewing and the possessive spectator in terms of home video technology and the ability to pause, fast forward and rewind favourite moments from films. Mulvey states: "In this delayed cinema the spectator is able to hold on, to possess, the previously elusive image (2005, p.161). Mulvey's points here refer to the physical act of freeze framing moving images and digitally possessing them, the gaze in this instance becomes fetishistic rather than voyeuristic. In the *Have it All*' works I created a tumblr⁸⁹ page and experimented with ideas of scrolling images using different profile settings. I tried to create gifs and slideshows that the spectator would be required to scroll to get through. I exported still frames from the videos and uploaded them to tumblr where I used a profile theme that enabled viewers to tap each image to move on, much in the way a stop motion works or a flicker book.

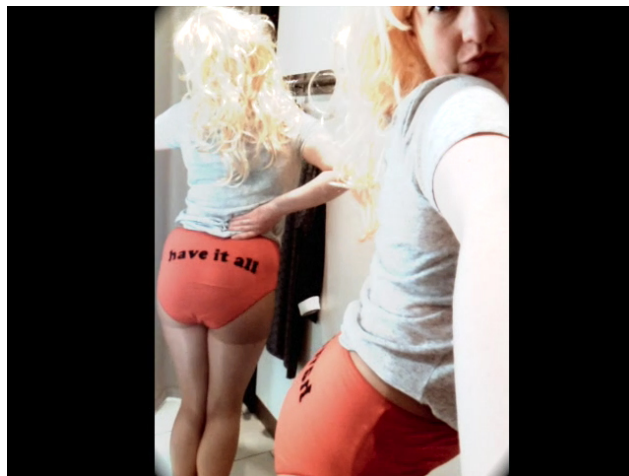


Figure 85. Laura O'Connor, *Have it All*, still from video slideshow.

⁸⁹ Tumblr is a micro-blogging social network where users post images and texts and can attain certain levels of anonymity.



QR Code 1. Laura O'Connor, *Have it All*, Tumblr
 Image link: <https://sweety-darling.tumblr.com/post/89745398495>

This word 'tap' compelled me want the viewer to physically tap their device in order to create a moving image. Although this work is successful on a laptop, when you view the page on a Smartphone the images are presented individually, this makes scrolling through impossible and doesn't quite have the effect I was aiming to achieve. I have included a link to the work via QR Code, which is best viewed on a laptop.

I created a video piece with this work that featured two vertical windows where on one side of the frame a video of fingers scrolling on a laptop trackpad appear and on the other the slideshow of still frames move. This video shows how I was working through ways of creating images that implicated the spectator and extended their interactivity as a reflective practice. This physical interaction of tapping that is called upon of the spectator incorporates their participation into the piece creating possessive spectatorship. This video was projected onto the street from PS2 Gallery window here I was experimenting with scale and space, extending the work onto the street. However, I was looking for a way in which the public could access this video online at the same time.



Figure 86. Laura O'Connor, *Have it All*, 2014
Video projection in PS2 Window Belfast



QR Code 2. Laura O'Connor, *Have it all (scrolling)*, video, 6.52 mins
Video link: <https://youtu.be/SdKUtnUxOU>

As in the work of Hershman Leeson and VNS Matrix in chapter one the body of the spectator is actively in conversation with the subject on screen and without this relationship the piece does not work. Net artists have been working with HTML and Hypertext since the early nineties creating websites that make the spectator click through pages to drive narrative, so this concept of the online possessive spectator is not new.⁹⁰ However these artists were writing their own code and dictating how the work moved. As in Hershman Leeson's works there are multiple ways in which to drive the narrative but these are not unlimited. The challenge for the works I am creating and the artists in my case studies is that the platforms are already there. These platforms are not created by the artist rather the artist is attempting to intercept and cause disruption in these spaces where Erika Balsom states: "selfhood is shaped according to the demands of social media applications, as if following a template" (2016, p.47). Like the works in chapter

⁹⁰ See Olina Lialina's work *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War*, 1996

one my tumblr piece requires interaction, however the spectator does not need to be in the gallery to experience the work therefore the artist has no control over the conditions of viewing. This is the problematic issue for works created on social media that my practice addresses. Particularly for this piece as the imagery is so similar to a typical changing room selfie the subversion is possibly too discreet to appear any different to images of the same.



Figure 87. Laura O'Connor, *Have it All (on the beach)*, 2014, video, 3.07 mins



QR Code 3. Laura O'Connor *Have it all (on the beach)*
YouTube link : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udfdbnf66OI&t=8s>

These works interrogated the fragmented and cropped images of the body online, experimenting with fitting my whole body into the screen using only my Smartphone draws on the notion of the body being too close to see and in this case my body is too close for the spectator to see. This body on screen performed the haptic televisual body where I created an intersubjective relationship between spectator and screen subject through the required physical act of viewing through possessive spectatorship.

In the video *Have it All (on the beach)* (Figure 86) I filmed myself on the floor in the knickers trying to fit my whole body on screen. I filmed this on green screen and in post-production I put a screensaver video of a beach behind me. This badly produced video of the body in a familiar position of the selfie and in a familiar surrounding of the screensaver, yet composed with little finesse aimed to deal with my body in the sense that it created a haptic visuality in terms of filling the frame and digitally warping parts of the image. It is the familiar as unfamiliar, yet it wasn't fully achieving what I was investigating. I posted it on Instagram in the following days and it didn't seem to gain any audience and again the video was saying nothing in this space. Working through these ideas and challenges drove me to think about liveness and duration and how these elements could be key strategies in expanding the works creating more interactive pieces and really focusing on situating the spectator as a crucial element of the work.

Live Stream Selfie Videos

From these early processes I started to use the strategy of the selfie video as way to expand the experience of viewing the selfie as a still image. This unedited video contained more information yet the action and image of taking the selfie remained. Social media platforms had also started introducing live video as a feature, Twitter's app Periscope being one of the first. In chapter two I discussed Jennifer Ringley's Jennicam website so streaming as a form is not new to online practices. It has also been a feature on broadcasting sites and porn before Periscope. But Periscope as a branch of Twitter brings broadcasting into the digital everyday where it had not been before. With better Internet speeds and phone capabilities broadcasting became a much more available tool to Smartphone users. For me it was a chance to use duration/temporality and liveness/context in my performances and to explore a space that transcended notions of public and private. In these pieces I would find a private space within a public building such as a nightclub toilet or a clothes shop changing room. I chose

these spaces as they are common backgrounds in selfie images⁹¹. In the SelfieCity project co-ordinated by Lev Manovich and a team of researchers, art historian and researcher Alise Tifentale noted: “a selfie taken in front of a mirror stands out as a particular type or even sub-genre of the selfie” (2014). Tifentale draws on art historian Jean-Francois Chevrier’s observations on the bathroom mirror being “the most intimate place for narcissistic contemplation...where every distinction of the self is in the end abolished” (ibid).

In these videos I was interested in performing just the selfie to camera, this act of self-portraiture being regarded by many cultural theorists as a way to perform individual subjectivity and become empowered (Tidenberg & Gomez Cruz, 2015). However many believe terms like empowerment are inadequate in this instance (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2012; Senft, 2014). SweetHeart doesn’t talk in these videos, and uses the slogans on her ‘hetero-sexy’ t-shirts as her video title. In chapter three I looked at how the selfie has been analysed as an affective practice that both works to empower women and take control of their self-image and also as a practice of control and self-monitoring where practices such as not wearing makeup are regarded as brave or heroic. Terri Senft (2015) argues that this dualistic rhetoric of the selfie being either empowering or disempowering is insufficient as the context of viewing and taking selfies are so varied and for different reasons. For instance selfies taken by Saudi women driving when forbidden or the ‘rubble videos’ in Gaza made in response to the ALS ice bucket challenge carry specific political weight that challenge oppressive systems of power. However Senft states:

Disempowerment might occur online in the form of being disciplined for taking selfies wrong; as racist, misogynist, homophobic, racist, ageist, or ableist attacks; as online bullying; or under the guise of a malicious meme that “borrows” a

⁹¹ Instagram tags 1,111,778 as of 28/05/17

photo generated for an entirely different audience
(Senft, 2015, p.1597).

The subject I have created in SweetHeart is specific to representations of the postfeminist subject as white, young, slim and blonde a position of privilege in the visual economy of feminine beauty. Whilst my body in some ways fits into this privileged position my personal subjectivity is not one that is interested in participating but unfortunately as I make myself visible online I am participating and I am affected by images of female beauty. Therefore there is a crossover with SweetHeart and my own identity issues. It is important to note Kathy Delivosky's work on the politics of beauty in regards to race and gender here in stating that even though I may feel this body is impossible, it is even less possible to achieve this "benchmark" of femininity if one is not a white, beautiful, heterosexual woman (2008).

Liz Losh (2015) analyses the selfie in two categories that she terms "Transparent mediation" and "close distance". Transparent mediation describes the inclusion of the image-taking apparatus such as the phone in the mirror of the image. Close distance analyses the close capturing of body parts, specifically the head but also in the case of the 'belfie' (butt selfie) the lower part of the body. Losh claims close distance refers to the "orientation of the selfie subject to an implied audience that is expected to be able to recognize the most significant features of foreground/background relationships quickly in the frame" (Losh, 2015, p.1654). This semiotic reading of the images refers to a closer reading of individual selfies that is more aligned to how feminist researchers such as Terri Senft (2015) and Jill Rettenberg Walker (2009) conduct small or medium data readings of selfies. Transparent mediation describes the apparatus of the image taking being present in the image as a way to expose the constructed nature of the image. Although not a new concept to self portraiture where mirrors, cameras and shutter releases have been included in artists self portraits, Losh claims the everyday inclusion of the apparatus in the selfie disrupts "familiar scripts of immediacy" and "constitute the new scripts of hypermediacy that establish online ethos by

including the means of mechanical reproduction in rhetorical scenes”(2015, p.1655).

The Periscope works I created went even further in thinking about the selfie in terms of transparent mediation. Periscope is a live streaming app created by twitter where users broadcast live streams and link the streams to their Twitter account. The videos stay on the site for 24 hours and are then deleted. Through the use of video I was able to incorporate duration as an element in the construction of this specific image. Performing the bathroom selfie as a durational portrait on Periscope placed the work in a specific context and temporality, levels of online interaction were based on time zones or when users were active. I wanted to use duration as a way to look at the physical action of taking a selfie and to expose the in-between moments that would normally be edited out in the photographic image. Mike Featherstone describes the body in process or the body without image in how duration in video formats create an over-abundance of the image, revealing “a more intense experience of subjectivity” (Featherstone, 2010, pp.193-221).

The very nature of Periscope is immediate communication, and it is presented in the app as a global activity where dots denote the location of streams, red for live streams and blue for streams that have ended within the last 24 hours (Figure 87). It removes videos after 24 hours. I chose not to use locations for SweetHeart as I didn’t want her location to affect the reading of the video. Once the video is live twitter posts a link to the periscope website and you can tag your videos to gain followers.



Figure 88. Periscope.tv map view, web image.



Figure 89. Periscope interface, web image.

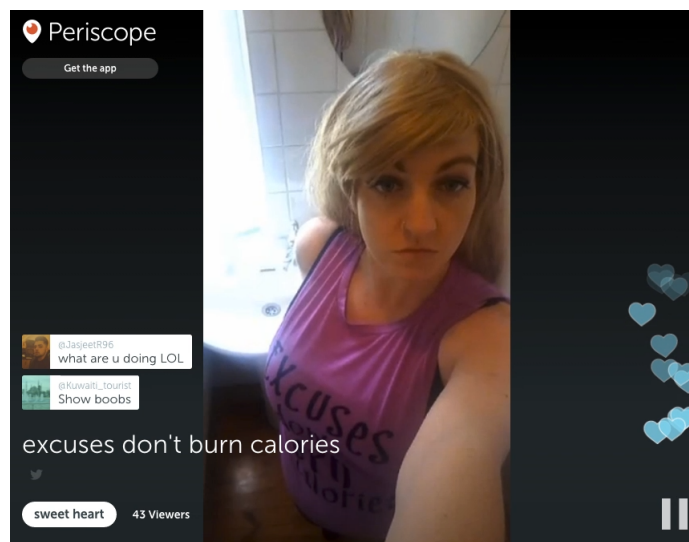


Figure 90. Laura O'Connor, *SweetHeart Selfies 'Excuses don't burn calories'*, 2016 4.00 mins
Persicope video still



QR Code 4. Laura O'Connor, *Excuses don't burn calories*, Periscope video, 4.00 mins
 YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF5cuxNWBIM>

Most videos lasted between five and ten minutes and generally I just stared down the lens of the camera awaiting interaction from users. The nature of the app is that when a video is live users can watch the stream and live comment or leave hearts by tapping on the screen. Again this action of tapping engages the viewer in a type of grabbing or fetishistic spectatorship where their body virtually touches the one on screen. In the video titled *Excuses don't burn calories* (Figure 89) I streamed from my bathroom at home and I had 43 viewers, one of the first comments were 'show boobs'. Commenters were confused about the fact that I didn't speak and looked like I was taking a picture. One frustrated spectator commented "shall we just screenshot every pose ur doing". This spectator's behaviour illustrates Senft's analysis of 'grabbing' where they threaten to take possession of my image through a screen grab thus compromising the agency implied in my self-produced video.

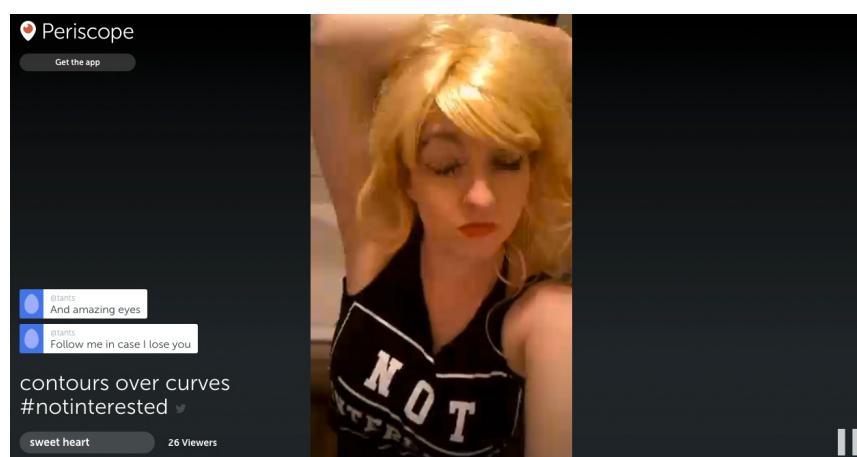


Figure 91. Laura O'Connor, *Contours over curves #notinterested*, 2016, 5.46 mins
 Still from Periscope video.



QR Code 5. Laura O'Connor, *Contours over curves #not interested*, Persicope video, 5.46 mins
 YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5e3SGvGPjg>

In the video *contours over curves #not interested* (Figure 90) I wore a t-shirt with the words 'not interested' and proceeded to shave my armpits in response to an online ad I had received for a contour razor that used the tagline "contours over curves" a comment on the latest trend of makeup face contouring. This type of multitasking was a response to postfeminist notions of self-surveillance and body maintenance. Performing both activities at once implied a type of hyperactive multitasking. The video had 26 viewers with one commenter asking me to follow them, as they didn't want to lose me. This language of following and losing echoes Senft's theories on grabbing rather than gazing and Mulvey's fetishistic gaze where this active looking gives the spectator the feeling of possessing the subject they are viewing

I created these videos on Periscope as a form of research. I wanted to submit the ironies I had experienced through this postfeminist subject into an online work. In this sense the ironic subject was attempting to infiltrate what Haraway terms: the "Informatics of Domination" however the performance of a subject that is already visible on social media does not interrogate as much as submit to the conditions of subjugation. I wanted to understand the implications of performing a subject that invites a fetishistic gaze whilst being in control what is filmed. This type of performing online, although created as artwork, does not challenge the systems at play within the platform and cannot control what the spectator comments or if they 'grab' your image. The authenticity of my performances was only questioned once in the video *Welcome to Paradise* in all the other videos comments are made as if the video was authentic⁹². In Periscope

⁹² This is in some ways an assumption, as I feign authenticity in the performance there is no way of measuring authenticity of the commenter's. But even with that in mind the comments were made on a performance that

you can save your videos however it doesn't keep the comments so I used Quick Time screen recording to capture the videos on my laptop with the comments on them.

Video Links



QR Code 6. *Run now chocolate later*, Periscope video, 2.51 mins.
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpJkKmKyTmM>



QR Code 7. *Dream girl*, Periscope video, 9.04 mins
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GE2h2TaKQQM&t=29s>



QR Code 8. *Welcome to Paradise*, Periscope video, 7.54 mins
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsXDCQw2CJs&t=17s>



QR Code 9. *Fashion Blogger*, Periscope video, 8.06 mins.
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvJ3ouHnjxw>

mimics so many on social media, so even if the commenters are trolls they still contribute to the discourse around this type of performance.

As these works only existed online for 24 hours (to my knowledge) their impact as art interventions is temporal. In seeking a way to present these works in a gallery and to further extend the conversation about the videos and the comments they received I displayed them in the gallery on selfie sticks held up by plaster cast hands (Figures 91-94). The sculptures were placed in the gallery at various heights and angles and forced the viewer to move their body in order to see the video. The size of the screen and having to read text required close viewing drawing the spectator closer to the screen. Michele White talks about folding and unfolding of the spectators body in a way that doesn't render them in control but failing to "achieve and ideal position" and that these positions "suggest alternative ways to theorise spectatorship" (White, 2006, p.177). Placing the spectator in a folding position in order to see the screen places their body in a vulnerable state and this strategy works as a way to create an embodied experience. Or as White maintains, to highlight "the processes that render spectatorship indicates how Internet and computer settings function and provides ways to oppose dominant narratives about viewing that would otherwise shape individual experiences" (White, 2006, p.10).

Another element to this work was re-appropriating the comments made and screen-printing them on to knickers and tote bags. These pieces made the works come full circle in that the videos were titled after the clothes I wore and the comments made were placed back onto items of clothes. These items hung on the gallery wall for viewers to read.



Figure 92. Laura O'Connor. Installation view of periscope videos at QSS Gallery, 2016.



Figure 93. Laura O'Connor. Installation view of periscope videos at QSS Gallery, 2016.

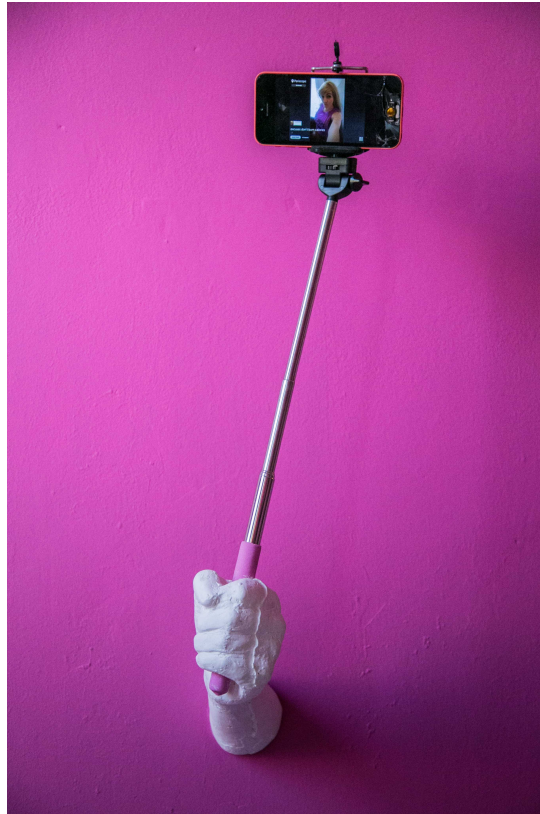


Figure 94. Laura O'Connor. Installation view of periscope videos at QSS Gallery, 2016.



Figure 95. Laura O'Connor. Installation view of periscope videos at QSS Gallery, 2016.



Figure 96. Laura O'Connor. Installation view of comments on knickers at QSS Gallery, 2016.

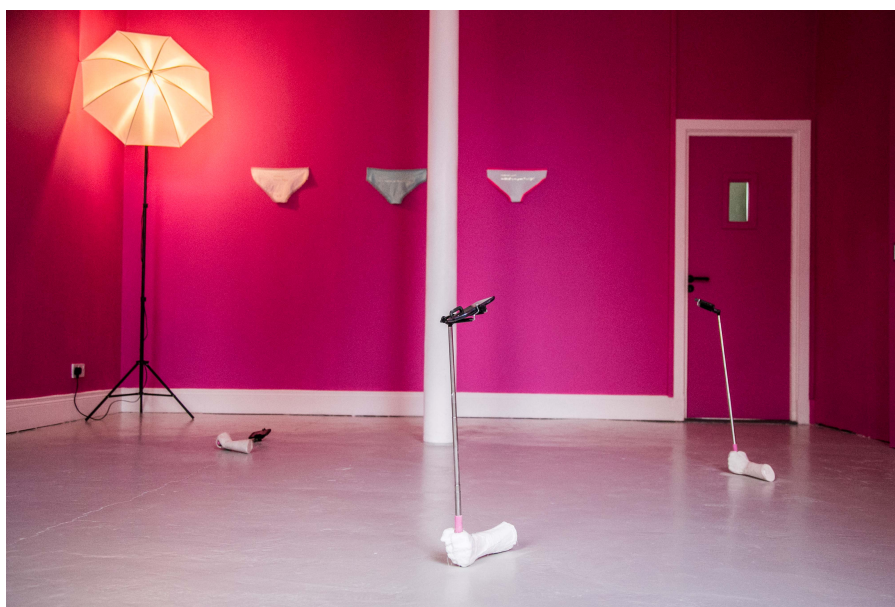


Figure 97. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet Everybody knows you're a girl*, Exhibition view. QSS Gallery, 2016.

Live Performance

As Artaud realized in 1938, the radicalization of cultural expression would most dramatically take place in this century through a direct theatrical

enactment of subjects in relation to one another, such that the hierarchy between actor and spectator would be dissolved and social relations would be profoundly politicized, (Jones, 1998, p.1)

In the above quote Amelia Jones opens her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones discusses the practice of body art, a practice where the artists body is performed as a method of unravelling and challenging cultural assumptions based on what the artists body represents. The challenge for performing the female subject on social media as a method of dissolving social relations lies in the shifting contexts and temporalities of the works. Although I am not claiming that I have the ability to control how the spectator experiences the work I believe that like the artists in chapter one the installation of such work in the gallery or public space has the means with which to challenge the spectator on a deeper level.



Figure 98. Laura O'Connor, *Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity*, solo exhibition PS2 Gallery, Belfast, 2015



Figure 99. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, solo exhibition. Performance image. QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016

In thinking about performing online in terms of the body and the authenticity of the performance I moved towards live performance that used simulation techniques and live streaming to extend my body as performer and construct it in a way that created multiple experiences for the spectator. In doing this I aimed at positioning the spectator as both possessive and complicit. This work was first created in an exhibition at PS2 gallery, Belfast, titled 'Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity, and then in QSS gallery as part of the exhibition titled 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'. I had the opportunity to use PS2 Gallery in 2015 as a space to test out ideas for this performance and then created a much larger edition of it in QSS in 2016. In these works I used green screen as a device to place my physical performance in a simulated environment. I used a live chromakey program (like those used in TV weather forecasts) that manipulated the video from the laptop webcam I then broadcast this simulated video live onto YouTube using Google hangout.

The background images and videos were taken from online videos of spaces occupied by women who perform various roles addressed throughout this thesis. They included bedrooms from YouTube vlogger's room tours and from cam girl sites, combining the two polarised yet similar spaces in response to the

dichotomy of subjectivities running through this thesis of 'appropriate' female behaviour. As stated, in my use of the bathroom and dressing room mirror as a site for selfie production, bedrooms are also regularly used as spaces to produce these wide-ranging performances. Vloggers use bedroom spaces to create their YouTube videos where bedroom tours are also popular (922,000 in search on 2/01/17). In their 1975 essay *Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration* Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber coined the phrase: "culture of the bedroom" to describe how working class British girls use these domestic spaces to engage in cultural activities such as make-up or listening to pop music at a time when boys had more freedom to be on the streets engaging in their own cultural practices (1975, p.213). Mary Celeste Kearney notes how McRobbie and Garber's text has been used in contemporary studies of girls media practices that focus on the "consumerist framing of bedroom culture", she warns that this analysis excludes how young women used their bedrooms to produce media of their own (Kearney, 2006, p.130). So while I may focus on the fact that most of the videos and images I examined in my research focus on consumption and the production of femininity through mass media, it is important to recognise the skills involved in creating these highly produced video. This labour sometimes goes unnoticed as researchers focus on a negative or consumerist viewpoint. Kearney believes that through the use of the Internet as a method of distribution contemporary female youth are "reconfiguring" their private spaces, not retreating to the private as Nancy Fraser describes as "subaltern counter publics" (Kearney, 2006, p.138). Similarly in my use of cam girl bedrooms the arguments around the agency of these performers are based around notions of control. I used bedrooms from www.chaturbate.com, a website that hosts live webcam performers, who perform for free and also receive tokens (which equate to money) and offering private sex/strip shows for a fee. Chaturbate may be seen as less demeaning to women as it is just a host site where women control their own windows and it's not only women (but mainly women) who perform. It is also considered a form of social media (Porn 2.0) as the performers are in conversation with their spectators. It is a

site that amateur performers use, where Feona Attwood describes, “ordinary people put themselves in the frame” (Attwood, 2009, p17).

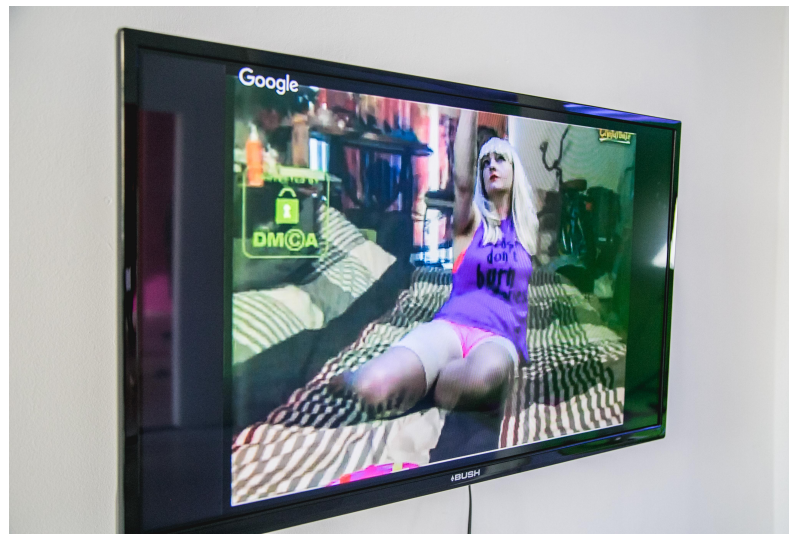


Figure 100. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, Installation view. QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016.

The creation of these performances and the reception of them when online is so context and site specific it is impossible to control how spectators perceive and interact with them. It is thinking through this notion of control so often applied to online performances by women that I created a simulated situation focusing of the constructed nature of the image both as something that is site specific and physically created to something that is received digitally in multiple formats. The aim of this work was to consider the multiple and fragmented ways in which female subjects are produced for and through social media spaces. The layers of performance and screens sought to position the spectator in a state of fragmented and hyperactive viewing. I positioned the spectator as complicit in the work as they were positioned in-between the live performance and the live-stream. They were also offered the experience of viewing the video on their Smartphones, through this physical interaction with the works I extend on theories of haptic visuality and possessive spectatorship. Kate Mondloch describes how artists create “warped spaces” in their use of mass media screens in galleries. Mondloch explains how in these spaces the installation and screen “draws attention to the

space between the viewer and the screen” and also the spatial presence of the screen as an object in its own right (Mondloch, 2010, p.64). In the installation I use multiple screens, virtual and physical spaces to engage the viewer in a heightened experience, one where their position in the space is activated and complicit in the works.



Figure 101. Laura O'Connor. *Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity*, 2015. Installation view. PS2 Gallery, Belfast.

In the gallery was a large green box lit with led lights and studio lights. On the floor of the box there was a laptop, a green exercise ball and various pieces of pink workout and make up equipment. Using these objects rhetorically in the same way as the slogan t-shirts and knickers, described by Dobson as hyper-sexy, as part of the construction of the postfeminist subject. They are more hyperactive than hyper-sexy; products directed at women through their pinkness or softness and also objects that shape bodies. These objects emulate a type of common knowledge that Paasonen discussed in earlier chapters when describing how websites and consumables were marketed at women by being soft and pink (Paasonen, 2005, p.7). The objects used in the performances also served as intra-active⁹³ objects where they affected the production of SweetHeart's subjectivity. Mary Celeste Kearney uses the term 'pink technology' to describe products

⁹³ Karen Barad refers to matter as "agential" where matter acts as an intra-active agent in the formation of human subjects (Barad, 2003).

targeted at girls that are based on “assumptions of gender binaries by researchers and developers than with the girls who buy gendered directed products (Kearney, 2010, p.3). Kearney uses artist Sadie Benning’s video work made with Fisher Price cameras as an example of subverting this gender targeted media.

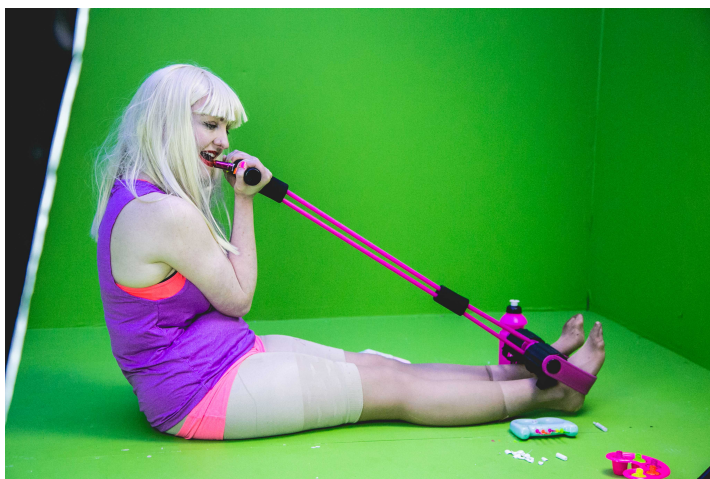


Figure 102. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, solo exhibition.
Performance image.
QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016



Figure 103. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, solo exhibition.
Performance image.
QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016



Figure 104. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, solo exhibition.
Performance image.
QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016

In this performance SweetHeart embodies the nomadic subject, she is not a complete subject but a 'figuration'.⁹⁴ Her fragmented state of being physically present and streamed live on YouTube (and at times Periscope and Instagram) through this simulated and digitally constructed image placed her in multiple states, contexts and temporalities. At the same time the spectator is experiencing each of these temporalities and states through their position in the gallery. There are a number of interactive relationships occurring simultaneously in this performance. My interaction with the laptop; this online interaction with the streaming space on YouTube; the live stream feed presented on a television screen beside the performance space; the spectator's position in front of the performance; the spectator in front of the television; the spectator in between the live performance and the live feed; the spectator's view from their device should they access the works online.

⁹⁴ Braidotti, (1994, p.1) states: The term figuration refers to a style of thought that evokes or expresses ways out of the phallogentric vision of the subject. A figuration is a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity.

The spectator is situated in a liminal space where they must decide which figuration of the subject to engage with. In the gallery the performance creates an awkward tension, where I submit myself to being watched performing this character as she attempts to position herself within the frames that are transmitting the performance. By doing this I am letting the technology dictate the movements. This is a reversal of the notion of the in-control cam girl. In the performance I must fit myself onto a bed or sit on furniture in the digital space. The videos changed every five minutes. Each time a video changed I had to figure out where to situate myself in terms of distance and height, many times adjusting the computer screen to facilitate this. I used a green exercise ball to lie or sit on. Between moving to adjust the screen and balancing on the green ball, there was this awkward communication between performer and technology. Dressed in typical SweetHeart hetero-sexy garb of slogan t-shirt and pants with Caucasian-skin coloured spanx and blonde wig added to the awkward movements. These performances that ran twice a week for two-hour durations responded to critical enquiries about the temporal and context specific experience of viewing the female subject on social media. Interactions online are temporal, and two hours is a long time to watch a woman perform where she is not engaged or entertaining in any way, but simply posing static. Like swiping through or closing windows the spectator in the gallery can walk away, but this decision is embodied. The physical act of choosing to leave or to not look is heightened in the relations between real bodies. As I stated in my experience of viewing Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Lorna* that fact that you are positioned in front of the work in the public space your actions as spectator become heightened and you are hyper aware. I also described how glitches in the works created disruptions between viewer and viewed, these interruptions were looked at in their ability to create distance and also how glitches and fragmentation invite a fetishistic spectator. In this work the interruptions created by the technology in the performance heightened the experience. There were times when the chromakey erased parts of my body due to lack of lighting as I moved around the space. Google and YouTube condense the video files to make them easy to broadcast and this decreases the quality of the image. The feedback sound

that came from the television and fed back into the recording on screen created a loud screeching noise like creaky old swings in a playground. The relationships in this work transcended the spectator/ performer where the technology spoke to itself in a way that was out of my, and the viewer's control. Marks' states that

The main sources of haptic visuality in video include the constitution of the image from a signal, video's low contrast ratio, the possibilities of electronic and digital imaging, and video decay. Because the video image occurs in a relay between source and screen, variations in image quality, colour, tonal variation, and so on, occur in the permeable space between source and viewer, affected by conditions of broadcast or exhibition as well as (literal) reception (Marks, 1998, p.339).

If we take Marks' description of haptic visuality then the videos I broadcast are grounded in these theories. Adding to this haptic visuality is the tactile relationship between the spectator and their portable device⁹⁵ that the video is also transmitted onto.

⁹⁵ That is providing the spectator has a Smartphone, or has access to one.



Figure 105. Laura O'Connor. *On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl*, solo exhibition.
Performance image.
QSS Gallery Belfast, 2016

Amelia Jones draws on the *synaesthesia* of vision in the works of Laura U. Marks and Vivian Sobchack, where "even the most ordinary images find their value, their substance, their impetus, in the agency and investments of our flesh" (Sobchack in Jones, 2006, p.20). Jones describes Marks' haptic visuality as it "celebrates the immersion of the subject into the object via desire" (ibid). Jones focuses on the work of Pipilotti Rist when she describes these synesthetic visual experiences. Rist's video works display floating bodies, bodies squashed into the screen, fragments of bodies that are too close to see and in these works she immerses spectators through huge encompassing screens. Taking Jones' analysis of Rist's works is useful to analysing the live SweetHeart performances. I build on Jones' theories of identity being a "process of negotiation involving complex circuits of identification and desire primarily in the *visual order*", the visual understood as "tactile or synaesthetic" (Jones, 2006, p.215). The interactive relationships created in my performance and live stream works incorporated physical bodies with bodies performed on social networks. In submitting the spectator to these fragmented states the work expands on this field where modes of viewing are essential when considering control and agency in the online construction of female subjectivity and in the works produced by artists on social media.

Performing the 'virtual feminine' subject through SweetHeart my work aimed to test out if it was possible to interrupt flows of information on social media where women's bodies are often regulated and objectified. Through the construction of an ironic subject I over-performed this character to a point of irony. Throughout this thesis I have looked at how theories of female subjectivity either encourage women to take up the tools of their subjugation (Braidotti), or to expand and interrupt in ways that work to challenge gender binaries (Haraway). Performing a subject that was closely related to my personal subjectivity but hyper-real in her taking up of all the tools at once in a type of masochistic performance attempted to challenge dominant narratives of postfeminist subjects. 'Having it all' and creating a subjectivity that contradicts itself in embodying a sense of empowerment and choice but also subscribing to the scripts of feminine beauty was a strategy used to explicate the confused narratives of the postfeminist subject on social media. Intercepting the networks proved difficult to attain agency and forced me to analyse my practice in how it could affect the spectator of such a subject. In response I created an interactive performance that positions the spectator in a fragmented space where the subject performs on multiple platforms at once. Challenged by the contextual and temporal obstacles in making work on social media this work proposes an alternative strategy where it explicates the construction of a fragmented and contradictory subject through strategies of liveness, duration and interactivity.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore how feminist artworks are created on social media, and if these spaces enable a type of subversive performance seen in early video and new media artworks. The main concern of this research was with how these works interrogate the systems of control, i.e. social media, from within when they are controlled by algorithms and moderators. Along with looking at theories and practices that centred on feminist subversion, women and technology and the construction of gender, I developed a practice that experimented on these platforms discovering their limits and developing my own strategies of subversion.

At the start of this thesis I was delving into a field that was familiar to me in my everyday life but not one I had used in my art practice. My history of art making consisted of performance to camera works where I challenged the representation of women in advertising, media and film. My works used duration, repetition, masochism and masquerade as strategies of subversion where I explored, what Craig Owens' terms and Amelia Jones utilises, "the rhetoric of the pose"⁹⁶ (Jones, 1998, p.151). Through attempting, and failing, to create a stereotypical image of 'woman' via my own body and very specifically acting out poses and images from mainstream media my video works attempted to position the spectator in an uncomfortable state where the image of my failing body was not something of voyeuristic pleasure but of discomfort. These works drew on Laura Mulvey's feminist film scholarship of the male gaze and the positioning of woman on screen as an object to-be-looked-at. For instance in the work titled *Dull, Limp, Lifeless* 2010, I stared down the lens of a camera wearing a blonde wig continuously for 5 minutes. As a fan blew my obviously fake wig the wind caused tears to roll out of my eyes. The absurdity of this act in the failure of my body to attain the beautiful image I aimed to replicate revealed the constructed nature of this female subject. Taking these strategies of duration, repetition, masochism and masquerade I

⁹⁶In *Body Art Performing the Subject* Amelia Jones describes how feminist body artists "enact themselves in relation to the long-standing Western codes of female objectification, (what Craig Owens has called the 'rhetoric of the pose'), they unhinge the gendered oppositions structuring conventional modes of art production and interpretation (female/object versus male/acting subject)" (Jones, 1998, p.152) .

attempted to create works on social media that would isolate the viewer and frustrate their expectations.

As a user of social media I was concerned with how the screens of portable devices and computers and the self-representation of women on social media was being addressed in contemporary art practices. Typically in mainstream cinema, television and advertising the images produced have tended to feed the male gaze; produced by and for men where women are positioned as objects of heterosexual desire. In this new medium where women are presumably in control of the self-image how achievable is attaining agency and how much is simply implied? These questions applied to both everyday performances of gender and to artists who use social media as the medium of their work. I was interested in how westernised norms of feminine beauty; young, slim, white, blonde and heterosexual was perpetuated on social media. In my research I discovered that networks encourage and regulate these norms and as these spaces are shared and, in many ways, controlled by global corporations the seeming freedom of individuality is a myth. As feminist artists have done in the past this thesis was concerned with how new waves of feminist artists are challenging these networks. This research comprised of a theoretical investigation into networked identities, cyborgs and posthumanism with case studies on contemporary artists and my own studio practice. Opening this thesis I introduced the theoretical framework where I analysed feminist theories of female subjectivity that focused on the construction of gender, female subjects and the rupturing of norms within new technologies.

Donna Haraway's 1985 (1991) *A Cyborg Manifesto* frames the issues of representation in the new "Informatics of Domination". Haraway describes how in order for 'women' to challenge these positions of subjugation feminists must recognise the multiple positions and multiple ways in which women are subjugated. Her theory of the cyborg is an ironic figure and "an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction" (Haraway, 1991, p.150). This responsibility in construction is to recognise that the category of 'woman' as something that must speak for all women and not just the concerns of the white middle classes is the problem with socialist feminism and in

the failure to do this the category of 'Woman' collapses. The concept of the cyborg challenges the concept of 'Woman' and works as an ironic strategy to consider how we overcome certain dualisms persistent in Western traditions that dominate all constituted as others (ibid, p.177). For Haraway the feminist cyborg must threaten dominating structures through the "interruption of communication" (ibid, p.164). I have used Haraway's cyborg theory of interrupting flows of information as a framework with which to explore feminist art practices in this thesis. Adding to Haraway's cyborg, Rosi Braidotti offers a posthuman subject in the 'virtual feminine'. Combining Luce Irigaray's theories of strategic mimesis and Deleuze's theories of the nomadic figure, Braidotti proposes disrupting the notion of a unitary subject towards a "subject which is definitely not one, but rather multi-layered, interactive and complex" (Braidotti, 2003, p.43).

The becoming-woman is subversive in that it works actively towards the transformation of the signs, the social practices and the embodied histories of white, institutionalized femininity (Braidotti, 2003, p.52).

The subject for Braidotti is embodied and through this embodiment the subject reveals its construction, not as a known subject 'Woman' but a virtual subject that is fragmented and multi-layered. In this thesis I have positioned the virtual feminine and the cyborg in relation to one another. Where the cyborg subjectivity is a concept of interrupting flows of information, the virtual feminine proposes exposing female subjectivity as fragmented and multiple. I have also positioned these theories with Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Butler proposes that gender is performative and that it's something one does rather than something one has, when we are labelled male or female we perform within the structure of that proscribed gender. "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 1999, xv). In order to disrupt these regulating structures of gender Butler proposes subversive repetition that calls into question the regulatory practice of gender identity (Butler, 1999, p.42). Whilst Braidotti's use

of sexual difference clashes somewhat with Butler's poststructuralist theory of a subject that is constituted through discourse their feminist strategies of challenging dominant narratives of the formation of subjects have both been useful to my research.

These theoretical underpinnings framed how I have addressed the performances of female subjectivity on social media. Butler proposes that gender is constituted through the repetition of norms, Haraway describes how the new networks of domination need to be interrupted by cyborg subjectivities and Braidotti describes how performing virtual feminine subjectivities offer new formations of female subjects. Whilst these feminist strategies are theoretically well founded, putting them in to practice on social media is not straightforward. For instance, all of the artists I explored in this thesis were engaging with and re-performing white femininity. As a white middle-class woman my claim to be challenging the misrepresentation of women through the repetition of gendered norms runs the risk of contributing to the circulation of these images. However, my performing these norms wrong or inappropriately works to shatter the illusion of the female subject rather than perpetuate the white feminine subject as a norm. In analysing the works in this research I was interested in finding instances of subversion that shattered the illusion and exposed the construction and perpetuation of white heteronormative femininity as a norm. In doing so these instances of subversion create the potential for a cyborg state. Not through the denial of gendered identity, rather by exposing gender as a social construct, regulated and encouraged on these networks.

In Chapter One I described early feminist art practices that worked with coding and computer programs that function to lead the spectator or user in a certain direction. The artists produced these programs and websites themselves. The group of artists and coders in VNS Matrix created games where characters destroyed their male oppressors. These works were presented in large gallery installations they also created posters for public billboards and zines to get their message into the public sphere. I focused on Lynn Hershman Leeson's two works *Lorna & Deep Contact*. In these works Hershman Leeson developed female

characters that were programmed to respond to the spectators touch and control. I discussed how the characters were in line with many stereotypes of popular female screen-subjects at the time and how they worked to reflect back onto the spectator. I described how my experience with these works that were produced in the early 1980s was not a smooth one due to glitches in the technology and pressing the wrong buttons. My intention in this chapter was to look at early examples of artworks that either challenged the misrepresentation of women in technology as VNS Matrix did, or how interactive works can create a heightened experience as a spectator. My experience of using Lynn Hershman Leeson's works where the work glitched and at some points didn't do what I wanted it to caused me to feel anxious in the gallery. I proposed that through these glitches they created what Margaret Morse describes as a "Brecht-like distancing that creates a space for reflection" (Morse, 2003, p.24). It is this distancing and unpredictable glitching that creates a tension between the user and the work. As the user is invested in interacting they become part of the work they have been offered control of the work on screen, however, faults in the technology mean control is only assumed but not always attained. Laura Mulvey described how new modes of viewing, such as home video, created new forms of spectator, moving from passive to possessive. In terms of Internet spectatorship Michele White describes how glitches in systems create pleasure in viewing through masochism, or denying the image. However, the spectators of these screens tend to be in private spaces, in isolation. Kate Mondloch's theories on "warped spaces" describes how the redeploying of mass media screens in art gallery installations transform the spatial dynamics of art and media spectatorship (Mondloch, 2010, p.63). If the deployment of these screens transforms spectatorship this thesis raises the question of how do artists create social media-based works to be viewed on personal devices outside of these "warped spaces" that cause anxiety or reflect onto the spectator?

In my studio practice I was working through ways of making work on social media where you could have an effect on the spectator's experience. Following on from Margaret Morse's theories on creating spaces for reflection I worked on

making a piece that would engage the spectator to the point of reflection. In 'Have It All' I used the social media platform Tumblr to present a moving image work. The piece was created by splitting a video of myself performing a selfie in a changing room mirror into still images and uploading them individually. The piece worked like a flicker book where in order to see the video in motion the spectator would have to continuously tap the screen. This form of tapping the screen was employed as a strategy expanding on Terri Senft's theories of "grabbing" as a form of online viewing. Senft's theories refer to camgirls performing online where webcammers are "consumed" by spectators as opposed to simply "voyeuristic gazing" (Senft, 2008, p.46). 'Have it All' was limited in its reach as I discovered it only worked on computers and when viewed on a portable device it didn't work.

The limitations of this work highlighted an important issue in this research. Unlike in the works discussed in Chapter One, making work on platforms that are developed already and have their own way of working limit the control an artist has. Discovering that trying to control the technology is futile, chapter two looked at systems of control that exist on social media where appropriate performances of femininity are privileged and made visible and those that step outside of the norm are made invisible. Internet theorist Sherry Turkle heralded online spaces such as MOOs and MUDs in their promotion of a postmodern self, where users could perform as whoever they wanted to, they could escape the everyday self. Lisa Nakamura's research shows how stereotypes of 'race' and gender prevail on these spaces due to users drawing on subjects from film and television. Online campaigns such as *Look Good Feel Better* also perpetuate notions that sick bodies can be validated if they engage in makeover practices. Going online to escape the body has positive effects for some users, however the focus on looking a certain way that is aligned with being feminine, pink and soft persists. Jennicam was one of the first webcammers to stream her everyday life online. The skill and work that Jennifer Ringley did for the Jennicam project became overshadowed by the fact that she didn't censor herself so viewers could watch her naked and engaged in sexual acts. Many believe Ringley paved the way for live porn webcam sites today. My investigation into the regulation of female bodies online

led me to Instagram and the removal of images on the site. These images were of women who were not 'skinny' and they had body hair or were menstruating. What these examples display is how regulators work to maintain the perpetuation of appropriate female gender performance through the making invisible what is deemed inappropriate. Bernie Hogan reminds us that just as Erving Goffman describes the front and back stages of performing the self on social media there is a third party at play and that is the regulators of these networks. These social media sites pertain to offer users the opportunity to be themselves and share their lives, however it is clear that agency and control are merely implied and always monitored.

Following on from looking at how online spaces monitor the types of female bodies that are privileged and how control and agency are implied, Chapter Three introduced the concept of postfeminism as an "object of critical analysis" (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p.4). Jennifer Ringley described how her performance online was different to others as it was more 'real', that she was more 'real'. In this chapter notions of authenticity are discussed through the Instagram performances of two women, artist Amalia Ulman and insta-celebrity Essena O'Neill. These performances are looked at through a postfeminist lens, where the sensibility of postfeminism includes femininity being a bodily property, a shift from objectification to subjectification, the re-sexualisation of women's bodies and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007a).

Postfeminist scholarship focuses on how young women are sold empowerment through the rebranding of traditional femininity as a choice rather than something that is enforced. I used examples of this form of postfeminist performance by analysing YouTube celebrity Zoella and her practices of traditional feminine activity such as applying makeup, shopping and crafts as forms of appropriate gender performance. Zoella's popularity is in part due to the perception of authenticity she performs for her followers. In the two case studies in this chapter perceptions of authenticity are what made them both successful and also lead to their downfall. Essena O'Neill's performance of authenticity

earned her hundreds of thousands of followers. Her performance of the perfect neo-liberal subject ensured her popularity. However, once O'Neill revealed the artifice and commercialisation of her Instagram images her fans and followers rejected her. Here, O'Neill's attempt to expose the so-called 'reality' of her online persona led to her invisibility online. The highly choreographed performance of the postfeminist neo-liberal subject in Amalia Ulman's three-month Instagram project earned her artworld fame. Ulman's perceived authenticity in the images she posted to Instagram and the level of transformation in the performance highlighted how accepted this subjectivity is. Her unquestioned performance where she engaged in escorting and plastic surgery exposed the reality of appropriate gender performance. Ulman's work circulated online and was covered by news websites globally. The presentation of the work in the gallery consisted of framed images on the wall with ipads underneath.

Looking back to how Hershman Leeson's works isolated the spectator I sought to explore ways of installing online works that would do more than simply display the images. In the periscope works I produced through the SweetHeart performances I uncovered a dark place where performing as a postfeminist subject online drew attention that did not make me feel empowered. As I performed as SweetHeart on Periscope I wore what Amy Shields Dobson describes as "hetero-sexy" clothing. This clothing where the postfeminist subject is "framed for viewers by mottos of self-descriptive texts proclaiming confidence, and dismissing the potential criticisms or judgments of viewers on the basis of autonomy and self-acceptance" (2014, p.98). The slogans on the t-shirts worn were used to describe the videos. Viewer's hurled abuse and propositioned SweetHeart in the live videos. As these works could only be viewed live I created a way to re-present them in the gallery that would isolate the spectator in an attempt to reflect the experience of the live work. I did this by producing plaster cast hands and placing the videos on phones in selfie sticks and various levels in the gallery. In this way the spectator must get really close to see the video, they must also bend over or stretch. This strategy of installation worked to create a type of embodied spectator experience.

I defined the personas created in the artist's works in the thesis as cyborgian, differentiating them from everyday performances due to ironic distance. This ironic distance existed in how I performed as SweetHeart, her intention was to disrupt and explore systems of control on social media. In Chapters Four and Five I looked at practices by artists online that play with notions of authenticity and forms of adolescent drag. These performances were also examined in terms of the various strategies of production and presentation. In this chapter I explored the concept of the 'teen girl', where artists Kate Durbin and Ann Hirsch defended their performances of teengirl aesthetics. Durbin even criticised artists who use teengirls in their work, such as Tracey Emin and Rineke Dijkstra, for not being faithful to the teengirl aesthetic. Hirsch claimed her performances were representing a subject not seen on social media, one who is sexy and smart. In Louise Orwin's work she purposely performed various iterations of the teengirl on YouTube as a way to explore the trend of Pretty/Ugly videos. In this work she uncovered the exploitative nature of uploading videos to YouTube as a teengirl where an older man propositioned one of her characters. Orwin presented this project as a piece of theatre, inviting members of the audience to the stage and awkwardly trying to roller-skate through the performance. Kate Durbin described her work as "passive aggressive" performance, where her white-underwear clad performers silently take selfies in public. Ann Hirsch presented her work as a live performance where she performed as Caroline, in the gallery, interacting with her online male fans. In each of these works the artists use public spaces to interrogate and expose how young women must navigate online spaces. The artists position the spectators in various positions between screen, apparatus and performance. These strategies place the spectator in a liminal state between screen 'reality' and performed 'reality'. These fragmented performances reflect ways in which digital everyday performances on social media are constructed and perceived.

In my gallery-based performances as SweetHeart I used various strategies of staging that focused on creating a fragmented experience for the spectator. By creating multiple images through green screen technology and displaying the live

stream on a screen at a different location in the space, spectators must choose which image they want to watch; the 'reality' of the performer in the green box or the simulated 'reality' on screen. It was my intention to isolate the spectator, asking them to make choices whilst also creating uncomfortable viewing as I rolled around the space for two-hours. This performance drew on camgirl videos where girls lie around waiting for interaction with viewers. The use of duration was a way to extend the discomfort for the viewer. By performing solely to be looked through the laptop in front of me and for the spectator in the space I attempted to replicate the woman on screen. My physical presence in the gallery makes my visibility unavoidable.

In Chapter Five I addressed the debate around online works being validated as art when they also operate as pornographic works. I opened the chapter by discussing the debate around Natacha Merritt's photography. Using a personal blog to upload self-produced erotic imagery, Merritt's images were re-packaged into a book by erotic art publisher Eric Kroll for Taschen books. Kroll framed Merritt's work amongst artists such as Diane Arbus and Cindy Sherman, her works were also featured in the Taschen book *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century*. Adrian Gargett describes how Merritt's cyber-images are a form of "becoming-woman" that question and re-position "traditional images of the body in the post-human condition" (Gargett, 2010, p.34). This Deleuzian reading of Merritt's work validates her position as outside of pornography and as critical in the alternative representation of women online. Kerstin Mey discredits these claims stating that the images do not show women in an empowered position but submissive and food for the male gaze. These debates also apply to the contemporary work of Leah Schrager. Schrager's multiple online personas perform for the male gaze whilst also claiming to attain agency. I argued that whilst these works performed agency in the fact that they are self-produced they also reinscribe the white female body as object of a fetishistic gaze. Faith Holland's *Porn Interventions* demonstrate a cyborg interruption to the network of amateur pornography. Holland's performance videos where she is explicitly "not very sexy" on networks where performing sexy bodies is the game, work to deny

sexual pleasure whilst using familiar language to attract viewers. Holland's videos work in two ways to address different types of spectators; she is denying the porn viewer pleasure in her performance whilst also directing the art spectator on to a pornographic site. In these site-specific works Holland challenges both spectators in multiple ways.

In the case studies explored in this thesis I have attempted to locate cyborg sensibilities in the works through instances where agency is possibly achieved. As the artists classify their practices as fourth wave feminist I have analysed their attempts to challenge the structures on social media that regulate acceptable and appropriate female subjects online. I assert that through performing as virtual feminine subjects the artists have attempted to unravel female subjectivity as something that is fragmented; not a fixed position. I have also highlighted the limitations within performing these subjects online, through the performance of gender norms without difference these works contribute, at certain points, to the perpetuation of norms.

As an artist whose work seeks to challenge the spectator my concern was how does this form of art practice implicate the spectator on multiple levels of interaction simultaneously? The nature of viewing content online is to click, scroll and move on, and is dependant on temporal and contextual situations that are impossible to measure or even effect. I see this as the challenge for social media based works, where many artists use these networks as spaces to explore the construction and regulation of female subjectivity they tend to also submit to these regulations in order to create works after the event.

Within my research project I have created artworks and a thesis that attempt to explore the contemporary performance of female subjectivity on social media as a form of feminist intervention. I have worked through theories of female subjectivity, networked identities, performance and spectatorship online and self-representation. I have approached these practices as a new faction within feminist art practice drawing on older examples of works in the field as a point of reference. It has been my aim to explore this field through theoretical and practice-based enquiry to uncover some of the problematic issues in creating

works on such image-saturated platforms. Whilst it is conceivable that by infiltrating these networks norms are perpetuated more than challenged, subversions lie in the re-presentation of the artist's experiences. My practice has attempted to create works that implicate the spectator and to create relationships between spectator and online performance that elicit uncomfortable viewing, whether this happens through the experience of my masochistic performances or that they must bend over, grab or tap in order to see my body. However there are limits to the level of control I have over the spectator. Whilst recognising the contextual and temporal situations of viewing as central to the works, these conditions are just that.

As an artist who creates works that attempt to impact the spectator through interaction and screen installation this research has given me insight into the workings of social media and the restricted nature of these online spaces. As I investigated, through my practice, the workings of social media I also discovered the importance of presenting or re-presenting the works. Controlling the conditions of viewing is impossible with online works. Previous to this research my installations were in controlled environments, this project has resulted in an expansion of this to consider the Internet spectator. The body became central to this viewing through acts of folding or haptic viewing, where multiple screens show fragmented images of the subject through glitches and interruptions in the networks. This form of fragmented viewing conditions worked to echo the fragmented construction of online subjects, giving no definite answer as to who or what the subject is, rather a fragmented construction dictated by variable modes of viewing. It is hoped that my practice has exposed how social media acts as a third party in the construction of the self, and how female bodies viewed on social media are treated through multiple modes of viewing and screening. The layering of the female subject through the use of multiple screens, platforms and fragmented images is something I am working with in my practice post-PhD. As a result of this research my practice has expanded into online streaming, multi-screen live performance and live durational work. In this research the female subject was the hypersexual commodified version of white femininity, one that is

perpetuated through advertising and self-branding on social media. At present I am focusing my work on the representation of Irish women and how their bodies are governed by the State. I am using social media and live performance as a way to draw out and make explicit the systems of control that work to monitor and maintain what it means to be an 'Irish Woman'.

As social media has changed dramatically over the past ten years, who knows what form it will be in the next ten. This thesis is an attempt to locate agency and subversion in the performance of female subjectivity on a platform that is constantly changing through devices that are continually updated and, as such this research is a temporal and contextual enquiry contributing to an ever-changing field. As a result I see this thesis as making a contribution to the study of practices on social media. It provides an historical account of the past ten years of social media and its impact on representations of femininity and feminist art practices within that.

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APPENDIX A

PRACTICE 2012-2017

The practice element of my PhD research worked as an investigative method with which to question new strategies in the field of feminist video and performance on social media. By experimenting with techniques and new media I sought to find a way of creating works were both subversive on social media and existed as a gallery-based works. These works responded to the theoretical investigations and questions I was asking in the thesis.

Throughout the thesis and in my research I came across many issues in this type of practice. How practices performed in the gallery and online, one being an everyday activity and one a professional practice. The pieces I created existed on many platforms and engaged with a variety of spectators and spectator experience. Due to the conditions of viewing content online being out of my control the work became focused on achieving a certain amount of control through methods of installation and interaction. In chapter four of the thesis I discuss Michael Wench's theories on context collapse, where the presentation of the self on these platforms is experienced in unknown situations to the producer. In my practice I dealt with ways of creating embodied and haptic experiences for the spectator. I wanted the spectator to be aware of their participation in the act of looking which is more than just passive, whereby they are made aware that looking contributes to the perpetuation of cultural norms in the performance of acceptable female subjectivity. I explored many different strategies of interaction to make this happen. I looked at flicker books and tumblr pages that encouraged scrolling. I also created live installations that fragmented the image on screen and the way the audience interact with the work.

In the following text I will describe the studio works created alongside my theoretical investigations. In the descriptions I will tie in practical decisions made based on the theoretical enquiry I was dealing with at that time in the research.

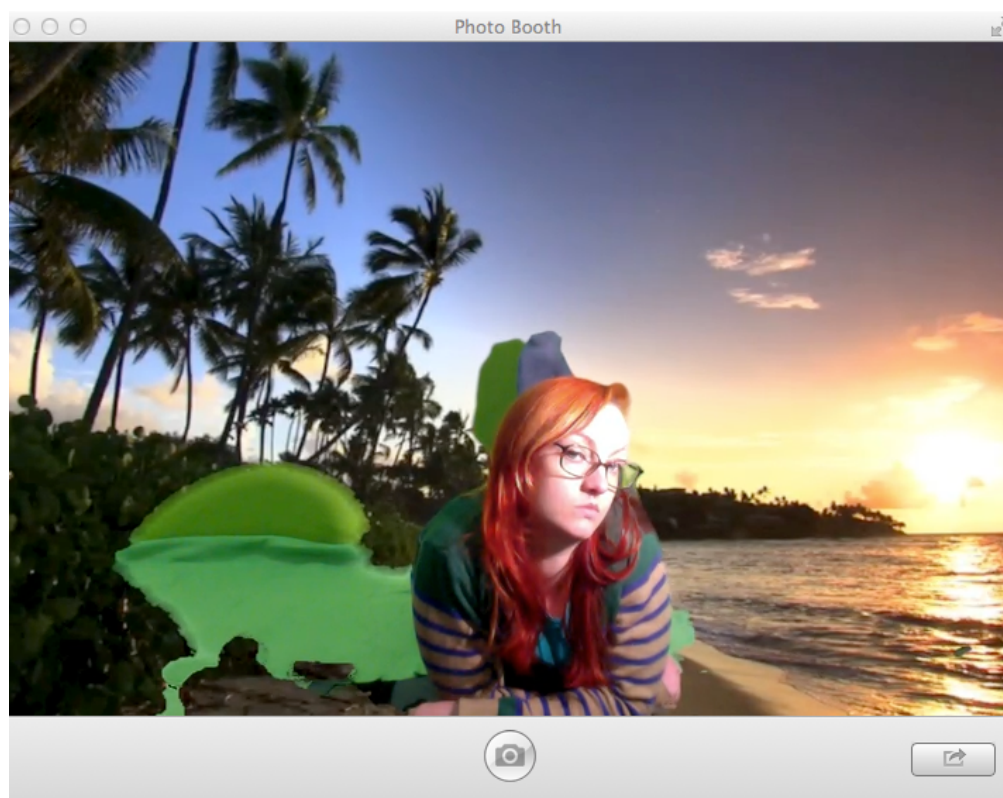
01. **Have it All 2013-2014**

Have it All was a starting point in the studio practice. I had been looking at postfeminist language or what Amy Shields Dobson refers to as “hetero-sexy” where a young woman who depicts herself as ‘laddish’, ‘sexy’, ‘wild’ and that she is “often framed for viewers by mottos of self-descriptive texts proclaiming confidence, and dismissing the potential criticisms or judgements of viewers on the basis of autonomy and self-acceptance” (Shields Dobson, 2014, p.98). The term *Have it All* could be described under this banner of hetero-sexy, as the message that is typically used to describe women who can achieve success in careers as well as the home has been changed in this instance to offer up a type of possessive spectatorship. The language used in high street fashion that both offers resistance to a type of male gaze and also an invitation to the male gaze is discussed in the thesis under Angela McRobbie’s theories of the postfeminist condition as being a double entanglement (O’Connor, 2018, p.92). In mirroring these fashion trends I created a pair of underpants with the words ‘have it all’ on them, these were the starting point in the video works.

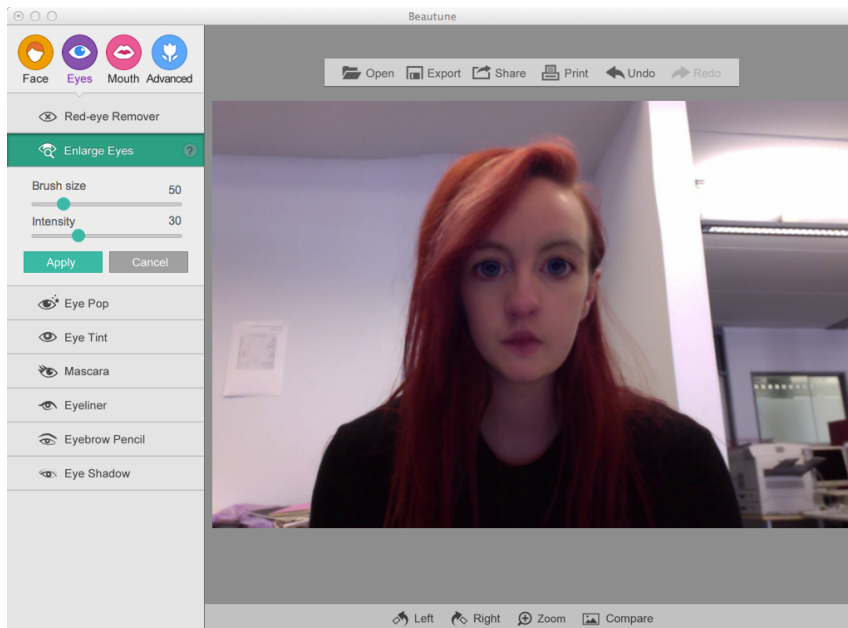


Have it All, studio image, May 2014

In thinking about the messages printed on clothes in high street shops whilst also thinking about the modes of self-imaging in these spaces I began to explore using different types of cameras, techniques and social media platforms to create new works. Green screen technology is something I had been using for a few years and this came into the work also. I was exploring apps on my laptop and phone that encouraged a type of image manipulation such as my Mac Book Pro app photo booth changing the background of a video to a beach. Others included makeover apps such as Beautune. On the app it states: **Beautune** can automatically soften skin and touch-up makeup, remove blemishes easily. It provides tools for every aspect of portrait retouching and facial reshaping. With no learning curve, you can start portrait retouching like a pro immediately.



Photobooth experiments, December 2013.



Beautune app experiments, December 2013.



Virtual celebrity makeover, Sienna Miller, February 2014.

In using these apps to distort or un-beautify I was acting against notions of conventional beauty to a point of absurd, however, I felt that even posting these on a platform like Instagram would be lost. I did use them as my personal Facebook account profile picture but as my friends know me it didn't seem to have an impact, but also made me question what impact was I looking to make? One of my main enquiries in this research is how can a work be subversive online, and

challenge accepted norms of femininity that are tied to consumer-driven ideals, this was a big challenge in terms of how one achieves this, or if it is achievable at all.

In the studio I created the work *Have it All (on the beach)*, where I dress in a blonde wig and wear a black string cami with the red underpants and roll on the floor. I then add the backdrop of the beach from my photobooth app. In this video I used my phone to capture my body in the form of a selfie but as a moving image. I was trying to achieve a video that explored the act of capturing an image of the body, offering it up to be consumed whilst also denying a full view at any one time. This fragmentation of the body is used as a strategy to deny pleasure or possessiveness whilst also offering the spectator to 'Have it All'. This furthered the idea of a double entanglement by incorporating the imaging technology into the work.



Have it All (on the beach)
Single channel, QuickTime video, 3.01 mins

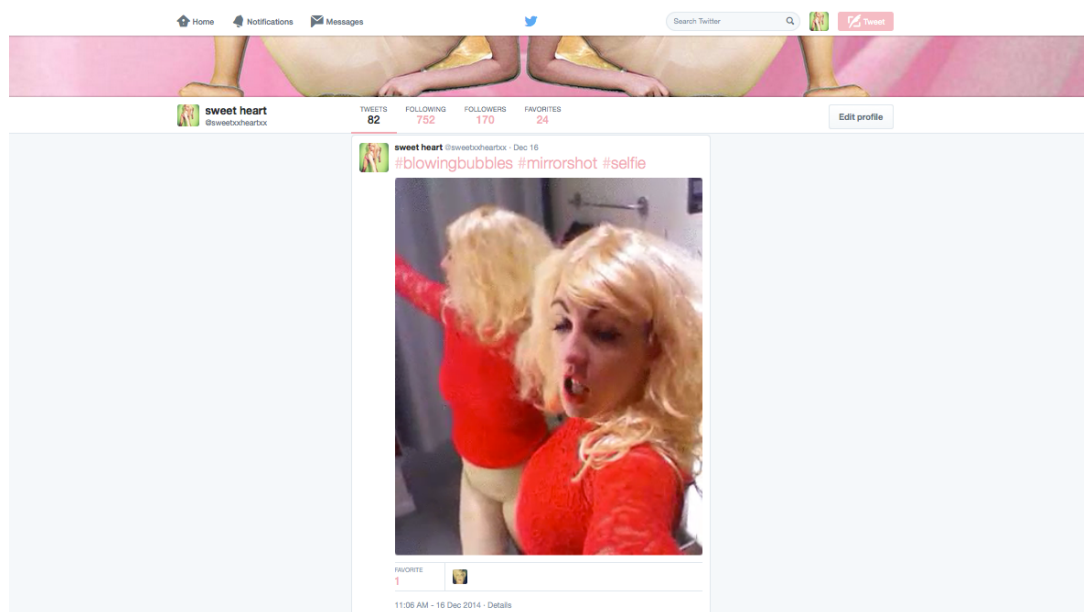
During this time I was creating selfie videos in changing rooms of clothes shops. Going in with my wig in my bag and picking clothes aligned with a hetero-sexy aesthetic and taking videos on my phone. I found a tumblr page that enabled a type of viewing where you must click or tap your keypad to load the next image. I found this reminded me of a flicker book and I was interested in how I could fragment these videos into stills whereby the spectator must actively tap the keypad or screen to make the image move. However the limits of this were that it only really worked on a laptop and I wanted it to be accessible on many devices. In facing these limits within the online apps I realised how I was working within the structures given and my lack of programming or technical skills meant I would be restricted to what I could achieve in these works. This became both a barrier but also the challenge within this research: how do we challenge the status quo whilst also conforming to its structures?



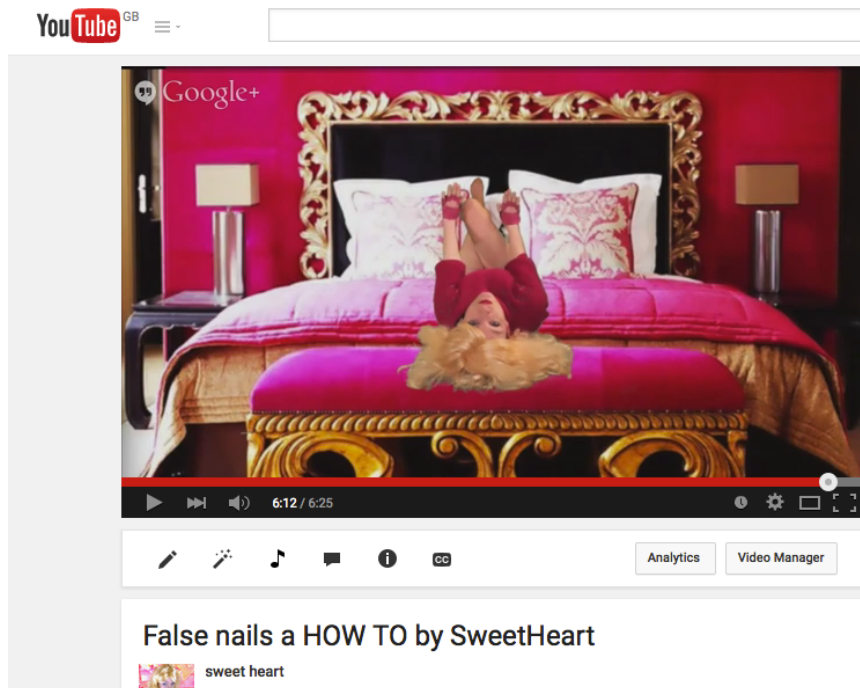
Have it All (scrolling)
Single channel, QuickTime video, 4.25 mins.

02.SweetHeart 2014-2017

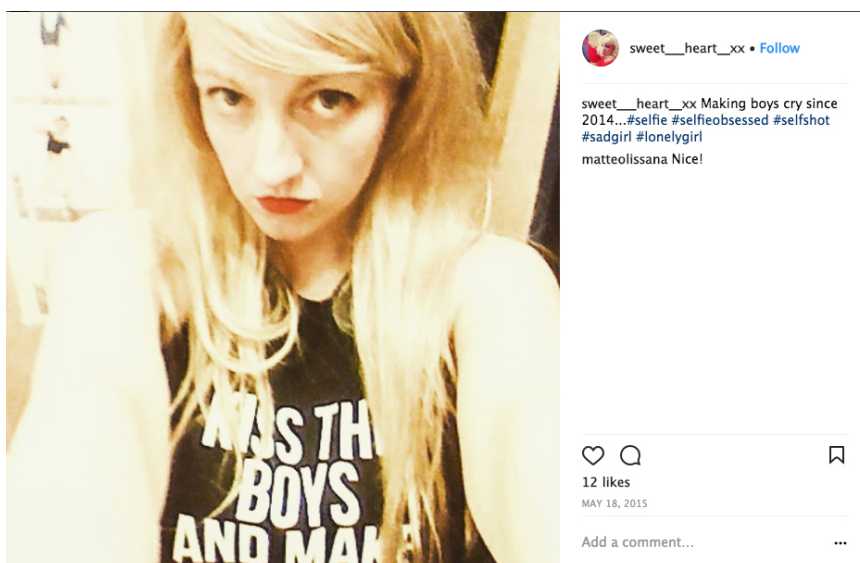
Moving on from these static works I sought to find ways in which I could perform on social media but also separating that performance from my personal identity. I wanted to infiltrate the network, by performing a type of hyper-real postfeminist subject. In thinking through the notion of the double entanglement and the contradictory nature of language within postfeminist sensibilities my aim was to create a character that epitomised these contradictions. In looking for a name I came across the fembot 'SweetHeart' which was a robot/coffee maker that caused controversy at a science exhibition at Berkeley in 1983 due to the condescending nature of what artist and creator Clayton Bailey termed "the world's most beautiful lady robot" (New Statesman, Nov 1983, p.352). I used the name SweetHeart as an ironic name for my online character. I was interested in how this name would attract certain attention and how through my online performances she would not deliver a typical 'sweet heart' performance. I set up an Instagram, Twitter and a YouTube account for her.



Selfie video on SweetHeart's twitter page



How to video on Sweet Heart's YouTube page



Selfie on SweetHeart's Instagram page

As SweetHeart, I began performing and posting videos to the various social media accounts. I was interested in how the different spaces of the performances worked in relation to each other. For instance, my posting an image online from a changing room mirror to it being received on another person's screen in a completely different place. The notion that context of experience is different for

every spectator means the image is viewed in infinite ways. I wanted this to be true in the making of the work also. Following on from the *Have it All* works where I was fragmenting the videos and reposting them I wanted to find a way to broadcast live and have some form of interaction or live response. In the beginning I used a livestream website called ustream that posted to twitter each time I was streaming. However, I found I didn't gain many viewers. I then started using YouTube to live stream; this is done by using Google hangouts and YouTube live stream together.

Around this time I was also researching the different types of performances online that were aligned with postfeminist sensibilities of control and power whilst also inviting a type of male gaze and woman for display. I was looking at live tube⁹⁷ sites where women perform sexual acts in return for tokens (cash) and are performed in their own homes. I was also looking at bedrooms as spaces of production where young women and girls create vlogs from their rooms performing makeovers or DIY craft videos. Bedroom tours also caught my attention, where these vloggers show viewers their bedrooms and describe their interior design choices. Influenced by these spaces of production that are both private and public I sought to make works that explored these multi-use and fragmented spaces. I was given an opportunity to work in a gallery space for a few weeks in February 2015 and it was here I returned to green screen as a strategy to explore notions of fragmented spaces. The resulting work was a solo exhibition and performance called *Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity* at PS2 Gallery, Belfast.

⁹⁷ A tube site is a term for a porn website that works in a similar way to YouTube where users create their own content and upload it to the site, viewers can comment and like just like You Tube.

03. Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity

I spent a month in the PS2 space experimenting with performance strategies. I had previously used duration and repetition in my practice as a form of subverting everyday beauty and fitness routines. In works such as *Dull, Limp, Lifeless*, 2011 (which featured in the show *In View* at the Golden Thread Gallery⁹⁸), a 5-minute video projection in which a woman (me) stares directly into the camera wearing a blonde wig while a fan blows her hair around seductively. She is unable to stop the air from the fan causing her eyes to water and she subsequently looks as though she is crying. Here the authenticity of the situation distorts the illusion of beauty and desire, and explores the line between representation and reality in the media's portrayal of the female body. This performing an act of stillness usually seen in the production of fashion images rather than in the final presentation breaks down the illusion of perfection presented in fashion photography. Moving from studio-based video production to live performance and live video production exposes these illusions ever further. The risk of failure in the performance as a live work is higher due the public facing nature this sense of failure becomes paramount to spectator experience.

⁹⁸ **In View**

10th December 2010 – 29th January 2011

Curated By Sarah McAvera & Peter Richards

In View is an exhibition that establishes a context from which to explore the tensions and dialogues concerned with the physical act of looking. The gaze holds multiple interpretations, such as the voyeuristic, scopophilic, erotic; and is as much dependant upon the viewer, as that which is being viewed. Each artist challenges us to consider our role as a viewer of the works on display, calling into question our gender, the gender of the artist, and our preconceived understanding of the subject, therefore highlighting the tensions that exist within the topic of the gaze.

In Vito Acconci's video work *Pryings* (1971), his violent attempts to force open the eyes of his subject are difficult to watch, as is the challenging gaze of Laura O'Connor in her video work *Dull, Limp, Lifeless* (2010). Like O'Connor, Katherine Nolan encourages the viewer to watch her, and yet reprimands them for doing so. Her work, *You Are a Very Naughty Boy!* (2009), obscures our view of her at intervals, as if in punishment for gazing upon her scantily dressed body. The photographic works of Shaleen Temple take a slightly different approach, commenting on the level of control held by the gaze of the subject, the artist, and ourselves, the viewer. The exhibition also includes work from Phil Collins, *Common Culture*, Sara Greavu, Magaret Harrison, Noëmi Lakmaier, ORLAN, and Aine Phillips



Dull, Limp, Lifeless, 5 mins, single channel video projection, 2011.

In the gallery I painted the walls and floor green to create a green screen studio. I also introduced a number of exercise and beauty products that are marketed to women in their pink appearance and 'feminine' appearance. These objects fall into what Mary Celeste Kearney terms 'pink technology' which she states has more to do with the assumption of gender binaries by researchers and developers than they do with the girls who buy gender directed products (Kearney, 2009, p.3). Kearney uses Foucault's theories on governmentality to look at how pink products aimed at girls work to maintain assumptions about the place of women in media making; the object of vision rather than the creator. The assumption that colouring something pink will make it more consumable to women exhibits that this gendered stereotyping continues to categorise women as soft and weak, and men as tough and strong. I further 'feminised' the objects by making them multi-tasking tools such as the ab-roller that doubled as a lipstick and nail varnish applicator.



Ab roller with lipstick and nail varnish used in performance.

As part of my research for this show I collected knickers and t-shirts with slogans on them that fitted into the hetero-sexy aesthetic.



'Who runs the world girls', t-shirt from performance.



Selfie pants, blonde wigs, pink sports bottle with 'never give up', pink workout gloves.

I devised a 30-minute performance for the show where I would use the objects I created to perform a multi-tasking DIY video that would be live streamed on YouTube. Filming on green screen I found a program that enabled me to live key myself onto any background I choose. I used an image of a pink bedroom in the background and performed as if I was in the space. In this performance I would use the ab-roller to exercise whilst also tasking myself to apply and paint false nails. The resulting live stream would be viewable from a monitor displayed in the window of the gallery. As the gallery is one long room with a shop front window the audience were invited to view the work from outside the space on the street. This spilling of the work onto the street added an extra element of publicness to the work. As the work was streamed on YouTube notifications were posted to Twitter and the Twitter account was written on the gallery window where spectators could interact through likes and retweets.



Image from PS2 exhibition 'Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity'




Image from PS2 exhibition 'Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity'



Image from PS2 exhibition 'Simulations, Interfaces and Performativity'



 sweet__heart__xx • [Follow](#)

sweet__heart__xx Who run the world
#girls



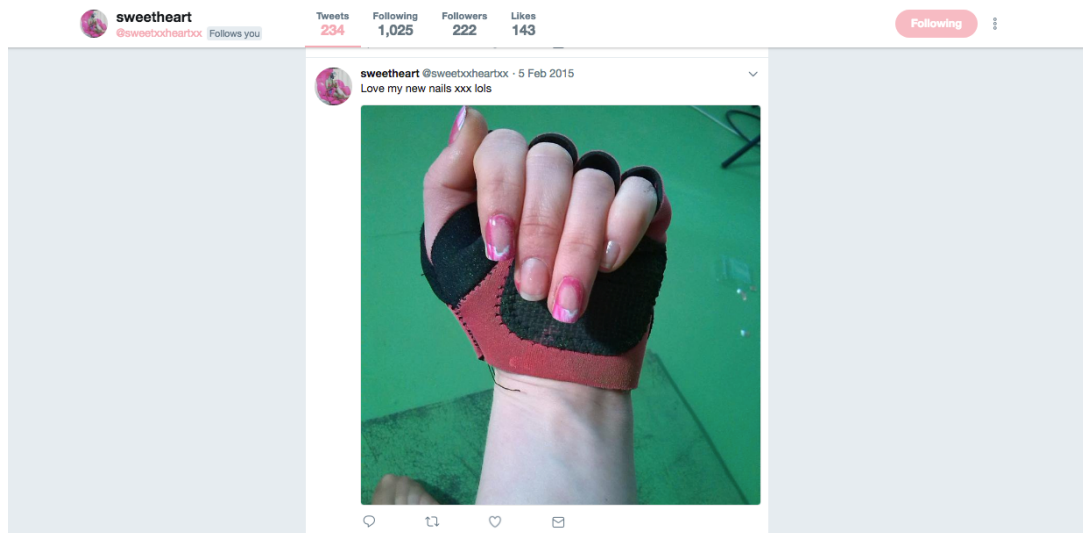
then.theres.kanzi likes this

FEBRUARY 13, 2015

Add a comment...



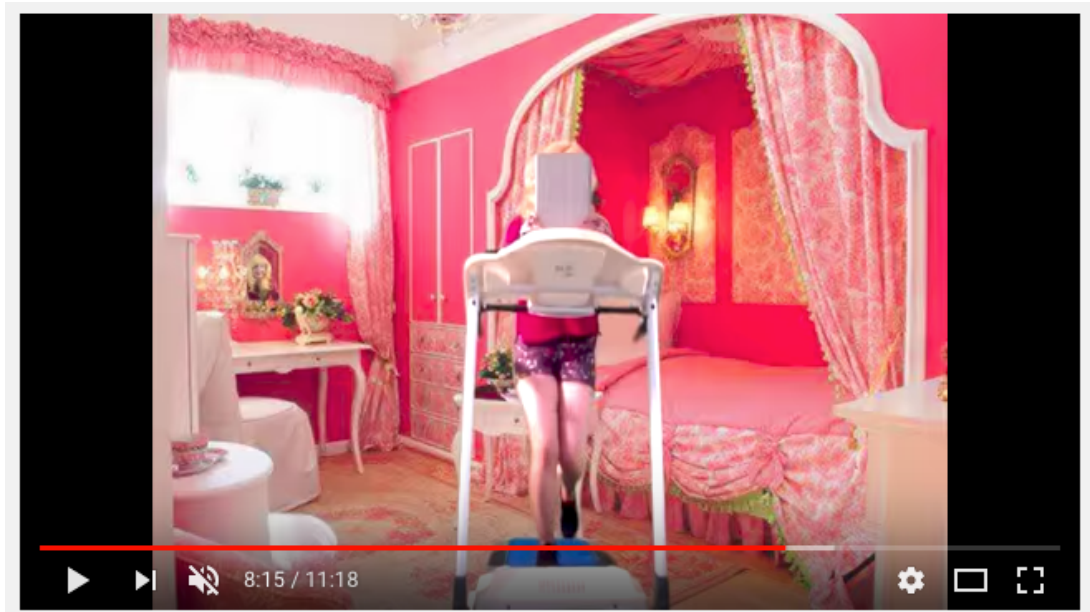
Image from SweetHeart Instagram page



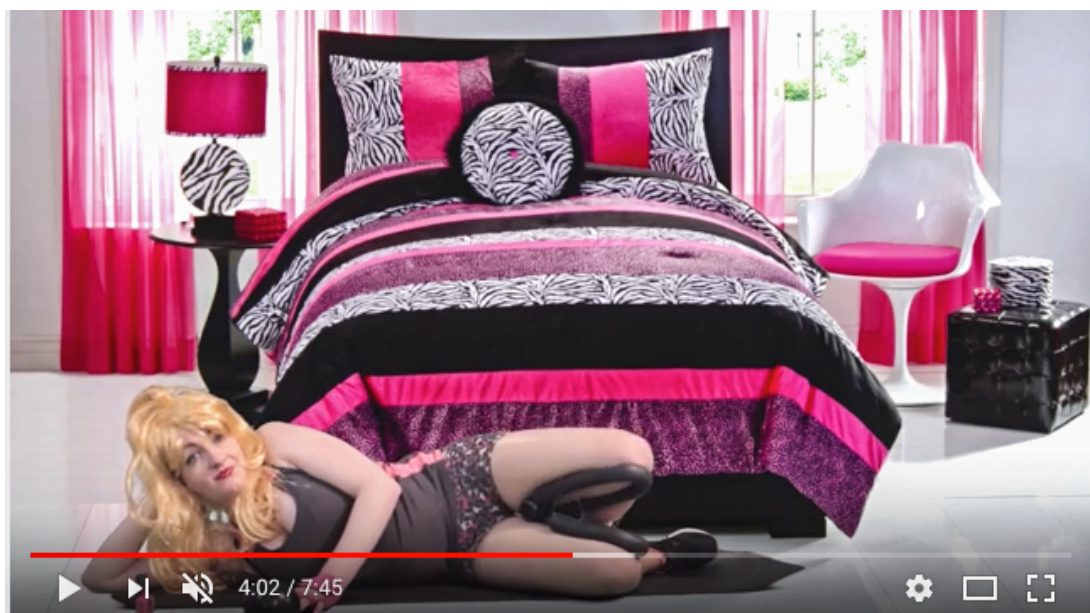
SweetHeart Twitter image

During the performance I would stop and take selfies and post them to Twitter and Instagram. As the t-shirt I was wearing had the term 'Who runs the world girls' which comes from a Beyonce song I mixed that line from the song until it was distorted and played it on repeat. The video that went on to YouTube has a warped sound as the live stream and the live music playing at the same time caused feedback, this happened by chance but it really added to the stress of the situation. SweetHeart began with planking and sticking on the nails. From the start she struggled, as the glue from the nails wouldn't open and she had to bite the tube, again this was not planned but only added to the situation. Once she fumbled through getting the nails on whilst struggling to stay in a plank position she then used the ab-roller, of which she found near impossible. She took a break every few minutes to paint the applied nails or apply nail varnish. The resulting video was streamed on YouTube and titled *PSSquared multitasking workout* (27.03 mins).

During my time at PSSquared I created a number of video works that I put on YouTube, all similar to the performance in that I gave SweetHeart a number of near impossible to achieve tasks, which ensued in failure.



Fun workout on treadmill
Single channel, .mp4 video, 11.18 mins



Planking, thigh master and nails
Single channel, .mp4 video, 7.45 mins.

The works produced as part of my residency in PS2 really informed where I brought the practice in the following year of producing work. Moving forward I honed in on developing SweetHeart as a character who used public space to produce multi-platform performances that engaged with spectators on a multitude of levels.

04. **The girl who has everything, I want more**



'The girl who has everything, I want more'
Single channel, QuickTime video (excerpt), 7.58 mins

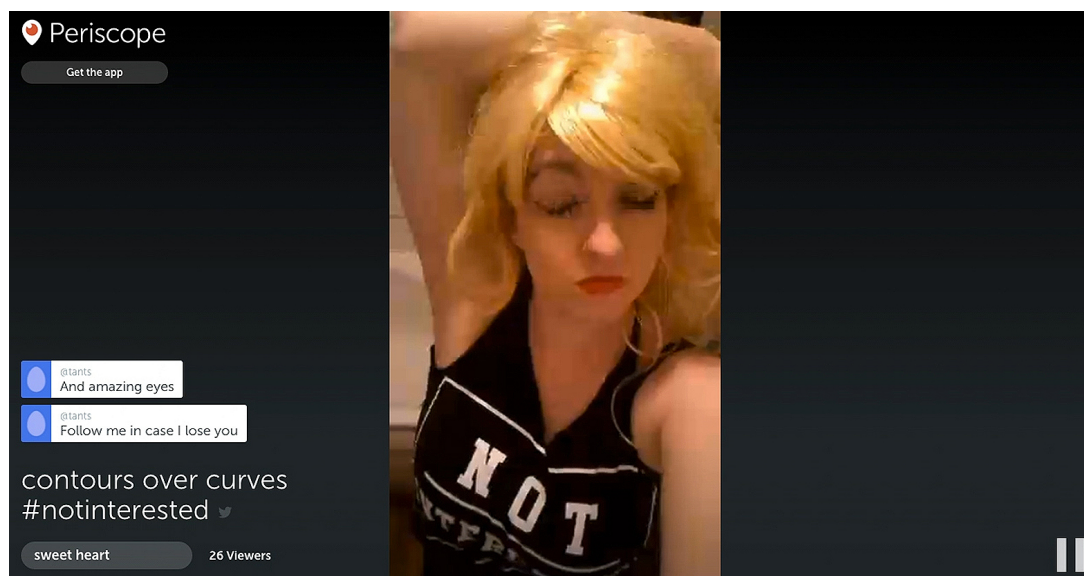
Livestock, a Dublin-based performance group, invited me to perform for one of their nights in MART Gallery in Dublin. Knowing that I would be sharing the space with other performers and wanting to perform as SweetHeart and to develop this work I was challenged with how to achieve this. As I was looking for my postfeminist t-shirts in Primark I overheard two women in their twenties discussing the reality of mermaids in front of a Disney t-shirt of The Little Mermaid in the women's section. This conversation and the selling of a children's fantasy story of a little mermaid who trades her voice to be human in the pursuit of the true love of a prince intrigued me. These Disney movies from my childhood are now being

marketed to grown women in a nostalgic and sometimes ironic look at ridiculous fantasy. However I feel there is less irony than there is fantasy in the purchasing of such items. In keeping with the act of beauty and doing nails I devised a strategy of gluing numerous nails on each finger and in this way making the act of doing my nails to the point of ridiculous a subversive act. As well as this I wore an extra-long blonde wig and used the ends as paintbrushes that dipped into the nail varnish and painted the grotesquely long nails. The gallery had space in their bathroom for me to perform, here I would live stream onto YouTube and also show the work on an iPad in another part of the gallery. I chose to work in the bathroom as another extension of this private/public space. I used scented nail varnish and sat on the floor for two hours sticking nails and painting them with my hair. I created a sound piece from two lines in a song from the film 'I'm the girl who has everything...I want more'. This played on repeat. The repetition of the sound, the strong smell from the nail varnish and the frustration in trying to apply the ridiculous nails created a manic scene of frustrated failure. Failure occurred in a number of ways that I did not predict. The gallery being an old fire station has very thick walls and due to this the WiFi is terrible, this issue meant the video in the other part of the gallery failed to play. This is something that occurred in many gallery spaces. However the work was broadcast onto YouTube and shared on Twitter.

05. Periscope videos

In my studio practice I was looking at ways to create the selfie videos I had developed in the *Have it All* works as live stream works that interacted with an audience. In 2015 Twitter introduced the app Periscope.tv. On Periscope, Twitter users can broadcast live online and the videos they broadcast are deleted after 24 hours. In these videos other users can live comment and show appreciation through tapping the screen, which shows up as a heart. I decided to create videos on this network as SweetHeart using my t-shirts as both inspiration and the titles of the videos. These videos are catalogued on the disc/usb appendix B in the thesis.

In the first video called *Excuses don't burn calories*, 4.00 mins the broadcast was filmed in my bathroom at home. Within seconds I received comments asking me to "show boobs". In the video I stare down the camera lens as if taking a selfie. This extension of the image and my blank expression sought to subvert the selective way in which self-portraits are taken and taken again and edited and graded. SweetHeart's silence in the video frustrated many viewers. In *Contours over curves #notinterested*, 5.46 mins I shot the video again at home in my bathroom and this time used a line from a targeted advert for women's razors. Contouring being a massive makeup trend specifically used in selfies to change the shape of the face. I wore a t-shirt that said 'not interested'. The act of shaving and hair removal being one that is expected of women however generally advertised as some fantasy act that women enjoy doing. The reality, in my experience, it is another taxing and frustrating act that I end up doing out of my reluctance to 'fit it' rather than draw attention to myself. In this broadcast SweetHeart gained attention from one particular follower who kept commenting asking her to 'follow me in case I lose you'. The irony in this is the t-shirt stating her disinterest and the comments looking to be followed. A still of this was featured in *Abridged arts and poetry magazine*.



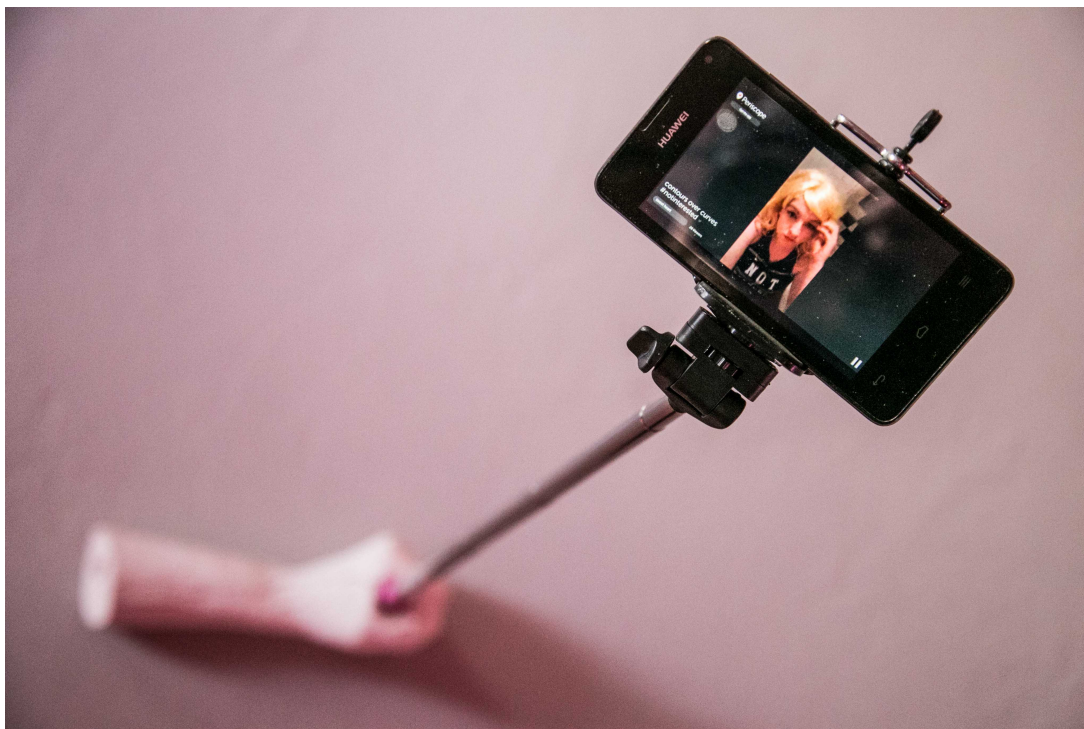
Contours over curves #notinterested, 5.46 mins

In *Dream girl*, 9.04 mins, I took the video at night in a nightclub toilet cubicle. This is the most offensive video I created in terms of responses from viewers and genuinely upset me as I was making it. The comments varied from 'love those lips' to 'show us some titties' 'fuck off', 'lift that top up'. The fact that I was in a toilet cubicle made one viewer call me a 'piece of shit'. I was interested in toilets for the reason that many selfies are produced in bathroom mirrors with toilets in the background; I've always found the semiotics of these images intriguing.

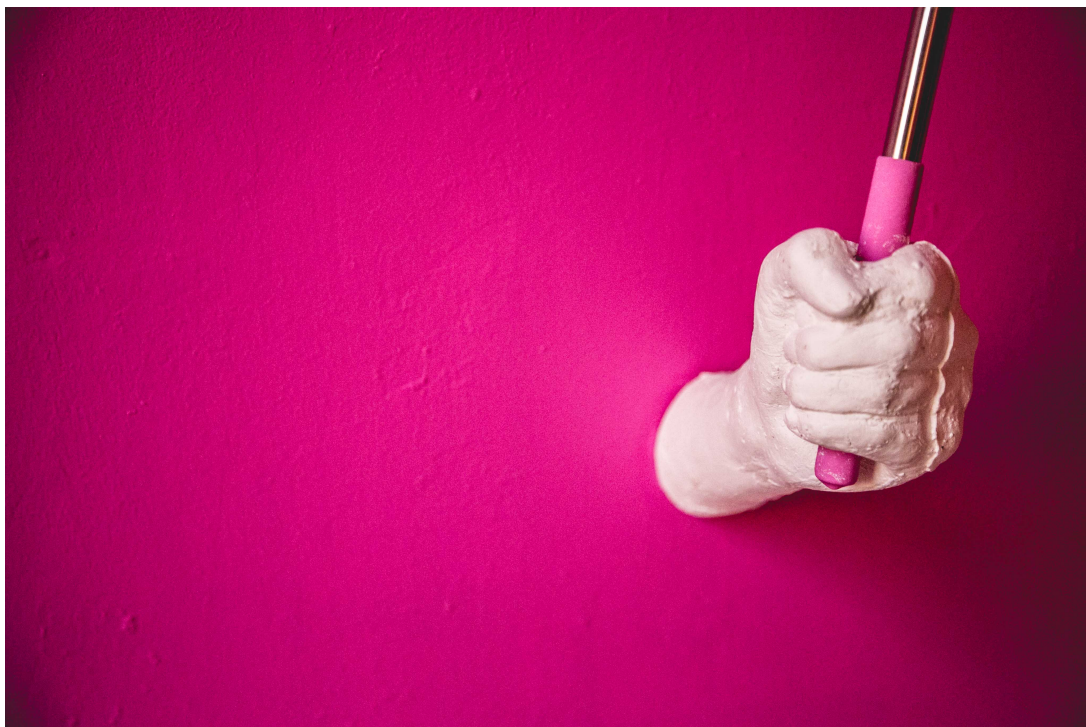
Welcome to Paradise, is the only video where viewers queried if it was performance art. The video was created in a clothes shop changing room. SweetHeart wore a top with the words 'welcome to paradise' printed across the front. Most of the comments were people asking me to take my clothes off or show more and other parts of my body. Again this refers back to the fetishisation of the fragmented body discussed in chapter 6, p.203.

These works were displayed in the gallery on selfie sticks held by plaster cast hands. The sculptures were placed around the gallery at different levels. The installation of the works was done in a way to get spectators to move, bend and stretch in order to access the videos. This strategy of installation aimed to create a more embodied form of spectatorship. As I discussed throughout the thesis and in chapter one in reference to my experience of viewing Lynn Hershman Leeson's

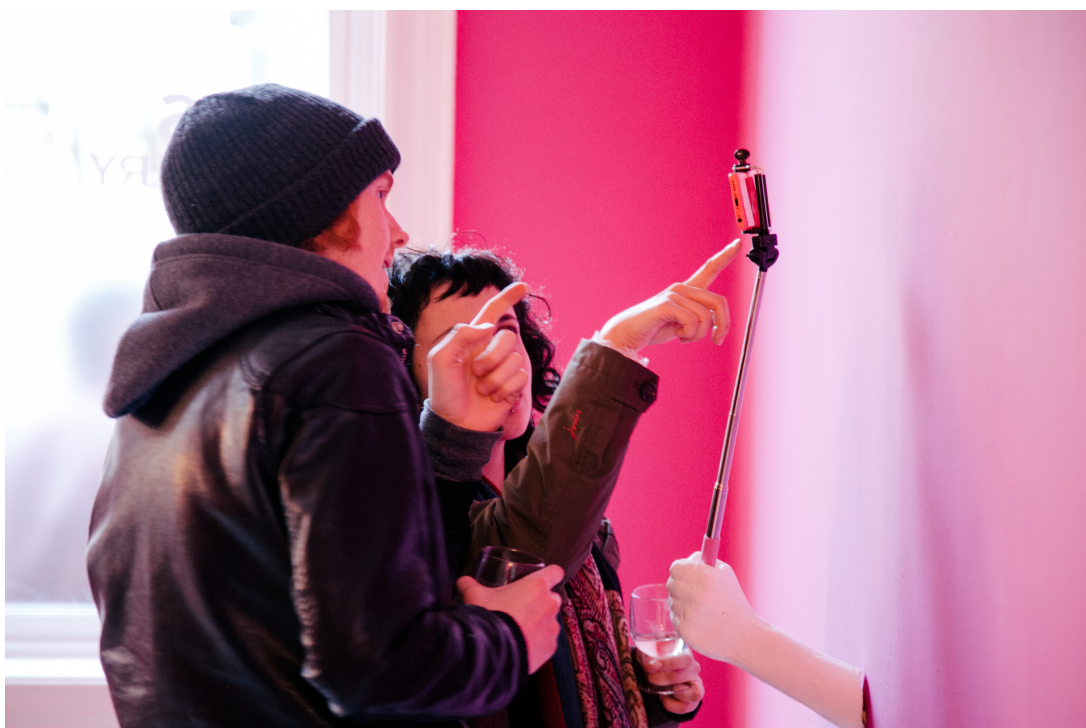
works by isolating the spectator in the space where they are actively aware of their viewing creates a more heightened experience. The plaster cast hands acted as postfeminist double-entangled objects in their own right as they gripped the selfie sticks in a way that could also be used as a gesture for hand-jobs they also make a fist denoting feminism. They could also be described as intra-active objects as discussed in chapter four as “‘digital-material-sensory-affective-spatial assemblage’ in which experiences of sexism and activist events become ‘part of the whole affective sensorium’ that connects those dealing with sexism” (Retallack, et. Al, 2016, p.17). The presentation of these videos where I am textually abused is a strategy in asking the audience to position themselves in a vulnerable state in the gallery as a way to mirror the vulnerability of the woman on screen.



Installation shot from QSS show, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'



Installation shot from QSS show, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'



Installation shot from QSS show, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'

06. **On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl**

Performances & Installation

This was the second exhibition I created as part of the practice element of the PhD. It was in Queen Street Studios, Belfast in May 2016. The title of this show was an ironic take on what Susanna Paasonen describes as 'common knowledge' assumptions of identity associated with the image of the young woman on social media. In the thesis I looked at the dichotomy within performing female subjectivity online, where one must be girly but not too girly and 'up for it' but not too slutty, and the versions of femininity deemed 'acceptable' that work to reinforce unrealistic notions and norms onto women's bodies such as healthy, thin, happy, nice, pretty, sexy, white, straight. The title of the exhibition references a cartoon created in 1993 in the New Yorker by Peter Stein. The cartoon states, 'On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog', this reflects a time before images and videos were shared and text-based communication gave more freedom to play with identity as discussed in chapter two via Sherry Turkle and Lisa Nakamura. I used the line for my show to describe how female bodies presented on social media do not always represent the lived reality or materiality of the woman, so no matter how you view your subjectivity, when you inhabit a female body the image is more important than the reality of one's lived experience. Of course this can be said of anyone who posts self-images online, but in the thesis I have discussed how young white women perform within the codes of acceptable postfeminist femininity.



Peter Stein cartoon from New Yorker 1993

The use of the term girl and not woman was that even 30-year-old women are called girls in contemporary culture.⁹⁹ I discussed Judith Butler's theories on the symbolic power of 'girling' in chapter four, pg.127. Citing the term girl, the female subject takes on the construction of femininity. In postfeminist terms 'girl' has been appropriated with the rise of 'girl power' and riot grrls, the term has been used subversively and submissively. My work explores the performance of female subjectivity that can be defined as many different things online yet still carries massive assumptions, hence the ironic title of "everybody knows".

The exhibition consisted of two rooms. In the first room as you entered the gallery (and viewable from the street) was a large green screen box or performance area. To the side of this was a television mounted on to the wall. In the second

⁹⁹ For example in the Beyonce song 'Who Runs The World Girls', or the HBO series 'Girls' about a group of twenty-something women in New York City.

room all of the walls were painted pink and placed around the walls and floor were plaster cast arms holding selfie sticks with mobile phones attached playing the periscope videos (discussed above).

The duration of the exhibition was six weeks and throughout the six weeks I committed to performing live in the space, in total performing eight times for two-hour durations. The performances consisted of me dressed as SweetHeart in the box performing to the laptop. From the laptop I keyed the footage of my performance on to different backgrounds that was broadcast live onto YouTube using Google hangouts, as in the PS2 show. I achieved this by using a couple of different programs and hacks. First I use the isight camera on my MacBook Pro to film, this live footage then feeds into a programme called boinxTV which is a live green screen programme used by online TV shows and newscasts. In order to feed this image online I use another program called camtwist, which records my screen (it makes the computer think it is the isight camera) from this I feed the footage of the simulation onto Google hangouts, which broadcasts live onto YouTube. In the gallery I used an Apple TV box to get the live video from YouTube to play onto the TV.

Green screen or chroma keying is a cinematic tool developed as early as the 1930's, it is used as a cheap way to fake large un-shootable shots. We are used to seeing movies that use green screen all the time, most Hollywood films that have CGI will do so using green screen, even though it's a technique developed nearly a century ago it is as effective today as it ever was (although computer graphics have improved). I use green screen as a strategy to expose the construction and unfaithfulness of the image. Green screen is incorporated into the live performance element of the work where viewers can see a monitor with the image of the broadcast and simulation in the same viewing field as the performance.

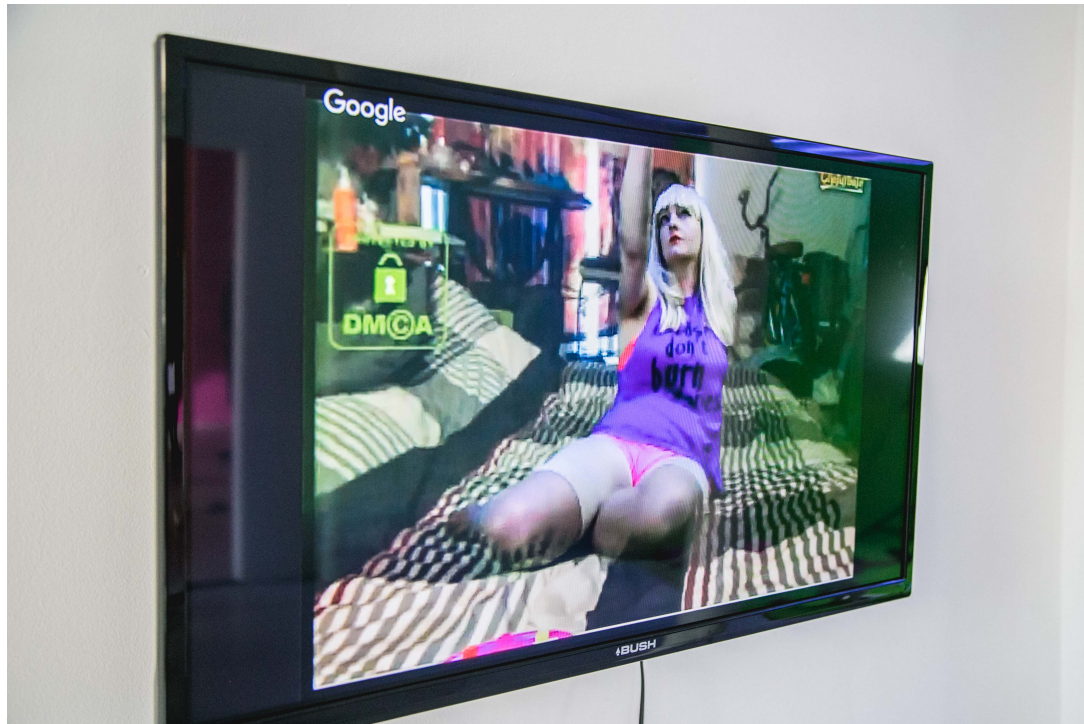
The green box also acts as a centre point that draws the spectator in. It acts as a spectacle and focal point as you walk into the gallery. As the spectator gets

closer to the performance space they are situated in-between that and the TV on the wall streaming the performance. In QSS I wanted to situate the spectator in-between the two, rather than being able to view the works at the same time I made them move their bodies in order to experience one or the other- or to move their head in a way that they are piecing together the two images.

In the show in PS2 I used a green exercise ball as a way to balance lying out flat as if I was on a chair, I used this again in QSS. As a strategy in the performance this object provided a number of uses, its unpredictability as an object to balance on created even more tension in the performance. I also used a number of hybrid exercise objects that I created as with the PS2 works. I composed a diary of the opening night performance, in this I explain how I used those objects and the decision making process with the performance.



Installation shot from QSS show performance, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'



Installation shot from QSS show performance, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'

DIARY FROM OPENING NIGHT PERFORMANCE

...It's a few hours before showtime and I'm pacing the gallery, I have only just decided what to wear, a t-shirt that states 'excuses don't burn calories' and my underpants that have #selfie on the back, plus the usual tan tights, although these are all ripped- I could have bought more but I quite liked the 'badness' of them- makes me think about how no matter how hard I try to conform I always get a hole in my tights or the fake tan I apply is always streaky. The ripped tights are a strategy of aesthetics, or anti-aesthetics and in this they deny a type of visual pleasure associated with perfection and beauty. This work is about visual pleasure and more importantly the denial of that. It's discussing production values, home production, apparatus theory, and the image as physical. Holding that image, creating that image, the before and after shot all at once, and everything in between. And in fact the audience are in-between the image. They are positioned to view the body, the apparatus and the output. Playing tennis with their spectatorial positions as they try to take it all in or 'to have it all'. The audience is

over-consuming just as the performer is. SweetHeart buys into the consumption and commodification of femininity as it is produced on social media and in high street shops. The fast fashion market and the fast production of bodies in 'before and after' images online are the fuel she uses. Her situation is one that is on show, 'to-be-looked-at' and her public anti-feminine femininity and the problems with that in the "over saturated stupor" (Braidotti, 2006, p.204) of commodified hyper-real subjectivity.

...Coming up to 5pm I check all the technology, set up the green screen software, adjust lights and the position of the laptop, go on YouTube and make sure the live stream will work. Time to get clothes on and set up. I enter the space before the gallery opens and sit, getting comfortable with my short-term home for the evening. For this performance I have created a background video that is a combination of cam girl bedrooms live recorded on my screen, YouTube bedroom tours by middle class teenage girls, and dolls houses. I used these 'feminine' spaces as I was thinking about girlieness as a signifier and rooms where cultural production was done. In her writing on immaterial labour on digital media Kylie Jarrett describes how even the act of 'liking' on Facebook is a form of disciplinary action where "you also submit yourself to, and legitimate, a historically contingent relationship to capital accumulation which is part of a broad global system generating intolerable inequities and exclusions" (Jarrett, 2014, p.24).

The production of these videos, although many created for monetary return, can highlight classed and racial lines of representation produced in online spaces.¹⁰⁰ Many of the women I have experienced online in these contexts are white middle class conventionally pretty young women. Although Michele White points out in her book *Producing Women* (2015), there are white women on these (online) spaces challenging such conventions, through alternative beauty acts such as 'frankenening' nail polish bloggers, or zombie brides on Flickr. White states that the

¹⁰⁰ For example, Gajjala (2000) suggests that they are rooted in an "Anglo-American hegemony which emphasizes the importance of modern science and technology for individual empowerment" and universalize the experiences of white, middle-class girls (p. 118)

whiteness of zombie makeup in zombie wedding pictures “skews the features of earlier constructions of cosmetic whiteness and can thereby help to reveal the produced characteristics of gender, race, and sexuality”(White, 2015, p.140). Another of White’s points on femininity online is a critique of the use of glitter and “too much” make up as a feminine signifier. She uses ‘queer’ to define that “too much”...“points to conflicts in cultural conceptions of gender and other identity categories. It destabilises and queers the structures by which we understand and navigate the world” (White, p.165). White also draws associations to the excessive use of glitter amongst women bloggers with drag, where the feminine assumptions of glitter use are more in line with drag, she states: “this expansion or explosion of femininity and the body more associated with horror and monstrosity” (White, p. 165).

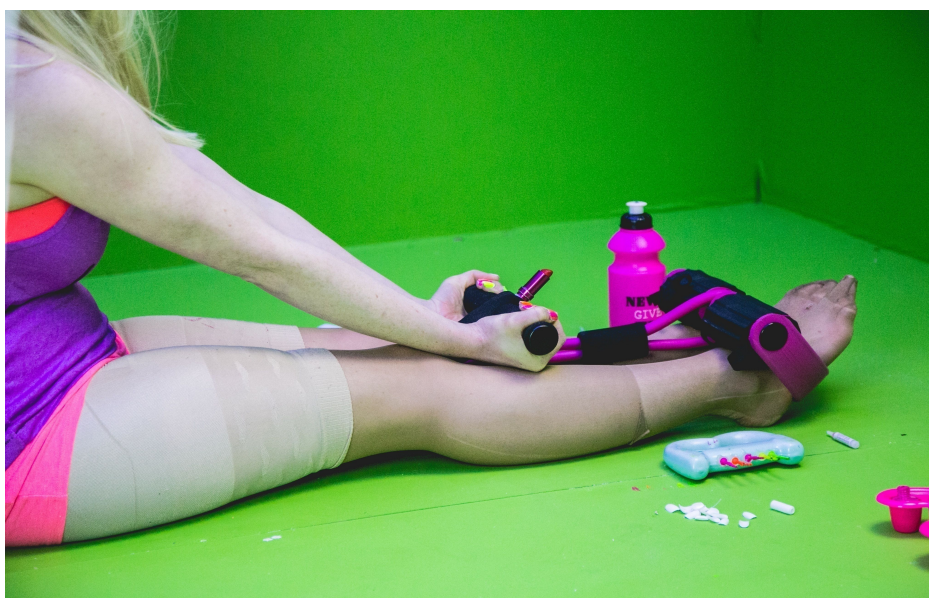
My use of the bedroom space acts as tool to relate to typically feminine spaces however the overuse of these images and the overuse or even comedic/tragic use of the pink equipment and make-up surrounding me work to queer notions of femininity in the way that White describes her online subjects doing. While the vlogger bedroom videos I acquired use beauty as their main focus, the other rooms I used were from www.chaturbate.com, a website that hosts live webcam performers, who perform for free receiving tokens and offering private sex/strip shows for a fee. Chaturbate it is a site that amateur performers use, where porn studies writer Feona Attwood describes, in her book *Mainstreaming Sex*, ordinary people put themselves in the frame (Attwood, xvii). What interests me about these spaces is the time and effort put in to sitting in front of a camera for hours, without even performing, you see a lot of women just staring into the camera or even just lying on their beds ignoring the camera waiting for an audience and someone to ‘tip’, in this way my interest is types of labour they perform, or not as the case can very well be.

...I’m still not sure what I will do in the performance. I have made myself a few props. For this show and in all my work I like to bring in sculptural elements, I collect exercise equipment and beauty products. The gym equipment I choose

tends to be pink, following on from Mary Celeste Kearney's critique of 'pink technology' I am drawn to items that are marketed to women by making them pink and 'girlie'.



Installation shot from QSS show performance, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'



Installation shot from QSS show performance, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'

I was thinking about women online and the performances they do based on body maintenance, food, beauty, or simply being looked at. I surrounded myself with objects that I fashioned into multitasking tools to give myself tasks as I prepared to

sit in the box for 2-3 hours. I combined an elastic resistance band with a lipstick so I could stretch and put my makeup on at the same time. I glued nail varnish brushes onto weights so I again could work out and beautify simultaneously. There is humour in these objects, but I feel that the position my character is in and the doing of these tasks repetitively become harder to watch, she is not failing as such as these objects are failing her. I've talked about schizoid subjectivity and this is something that was on my mind as I created these works. SweetHeart is herself a commodity and a consumer, her nature is schizoid and as such a product of her interactions with bodily maintenance online. She is interested in before and after images, how many reps of such a thing make my bum smaller or bigger. But being somewhat present in the 'real world' SweetHeart is overcome with this barrage of tips and tricks, the humour in the work is short lived, not that she wants sympathy, she is just bored.

As I mentioned when talking about past works the use of duration works as a tool, these performances are unnaturally long, especially as the actions performed are generally slow or non-moving. This drawn out duration is used to act against the nature of the entertaining image and I am also interested in extending poses. I am drawn to images where women are posing in strange positions and like to imagine what that would look like played out in performance. I am naturally a bit awkward and find if I try to look sexy I end up failing, so by trying these poses whilst balancing on an exercise ball over the space of 10 minutes or more the action becomes hard to watch and creates a tension between audience and performer.

...The opening happened at 6pm, people slowly came in and walked around, some stopped to watch me, others went for the booze and into the second gallery. In many of my performances I am not really sure how they will unfold, I am still not sure if I can call it performance, that terms troubles me sometimes. I don't really feel like I perform, Erving Goffman states that we are all performing in our everyday life to some extent, in that sense what I do is more than the everyday but less than theatre or some linear planned out performance piece. This work is an

extension of my studio practice. In the studio I can dress up and move objects around press record and stop on the camera whenever I want to change something, this is the studio made explicit! I suppose then this work not only exposes the subject of women performing online in different capacities but also the work of the artist who performs to camera in her studio. It was women artists who embraced the video camera to make performative works in the 1970s, even when they were accused of narcissism¹⁰¹.

When making such work in a live capacity it is hard to feel like you are not a narcissist. Commanding an audience to watch you perform, or not, is daunting and can feel extremely self-indulgent, but only in the way that you feel others *think* it is self-indulgent. When I plan for the works I am very clear that this is important work and is not something I am doing to feed my ego. But it can feel that way when the main spectacle is you. But I don't see it as me this 'SweetHeart' is performing a multiple female subjectivity. Her fragmented nature makes her subjectivity difficult to pin down. Yes, the clothes she wears are highly loaded, but what about the layers of tan tights with holes in? The bad wig, and her bad application of make-up? It is a tragic-comic masochistic performance. SweetHeart is not me, she is not anybody, she is a work of fiction, a hyper-real simulation¹⁰². Like Braidotti's post-human simulators SweetHeart is a kind of postmodern subject, unlike her simulators, SweetHeart is messy, her rituals are hard to watch, gloopy messy neon nail varnish, lipstick all over the place, heart shaped chocolate- material things - matter. Not a simulation but real matter, simulated into fragmented images and broadcast onto the network. SweetHeart is so fragmented she is 'in the flesh'...embodied, and, at the same time she is a simulation of a simulation. In this way there is no authentic self, she is the artist as alter ego she is also an image that works on multiple levels.

¹⁰¹ In 1976 Lucy Lippard wrote of Hannah Wilke's work : (the)"confusion of her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist, [which] has resulted at times in politically ambiguous manifestations." ('The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art', from *Art in America*, 64 (3) (1976):73-81

¹⁰² There you have the Pantheon of postmodern femininity, live on CNN at any time, any place, from Hong Kong to Sarajevo, yours at the push of a button. Interactivity is another name for shopping, as Christine Tamblyn put it, and hyper-real gender identity is what it sells Hyper-reality does not wipe out class relations: it just intensifies them (Braidotti, 1996, p.2).

I have studied the writings of Braidotti, Irigaray and Butler looking for definitions as to what my work did or said or tried to do. I have always performed popular notions or images of Woman, in numerous guises and disguises. I have investigated what it means to represent Woman in visual language. My work has always tried to respond to the absurdities I see on television and in advertising where women are represented as a homogenous group- they are unreal women, as opposed to the 'real' women who exist in 'everyday' life. I grew up very real, well to the best of my knowledge, and to be honest as a child who was thin and lived with much older sisters who struggled with weight, I was always seen as "so lucky" to be thin. I feel like this has had an effect on how I view my body, especially in adolescence when my body started to change and when I went to college and the excesses of student life took its toll. My undergraduate work seemed to always investigate body image and identity. This topic has always been the underlying current in my work, that and surveillance. I have always been interested in how we look at people and how people look, but more than that the feeling of being watched even when we are not, or do we know? I thought about Foucault and his panopticon theories, and the paranoia in Kafka. Representation and the fictions within representation interested me. However, I have always thought of the notion of Woman as simply that- a notion, not a truth or a known thing but something created through fiction and as way of domination or segregation in the way that it is tied to the idea of femininity. Man, too, is a notion, created as a force of discipline, to be a man is an unknown thing, but what we do know is that the myth of masculinity and femininity are still played out in public today. That public encompasses the everyday: politics, the home, the workplace, the courts, the Internet, the social. My focus is on the commodification of these myths and the acting of them within the everyday. These myths become commodified on screen. Looking at these presentations as myths I turn to Judith Butler who rather than Braidotti's thesis of reappropriating notions of femininity and presenting woman not as a known subject but fragmented, Butler suggests we leave it all behind and accept that gender is a construct created as a form of power and control, and through subversive performance we can challenge the whole

construct from the outside. Questions of sexual difference and gender become complicated to my work and me. I feel that although my work aims to be subversive it is still participating in some kind of recon/decon-struction of heteronormative subjectivity, a re-territorialising. The idea that inserting ones own body in the work is a narcissistic display and impossible to have any true value as art in the fact that it is repeating the thing it is interrogating. Butler is also cautious about the agency within subjugation, for if we are challenging gendered subjectivity and working to remove the shackles of this regulated position, what happens after that? If the subject is produced by power then agency is the impasse of the subject but if power is produced by the subject then agency is the condition of the subject.¹⁰³ Butler states:

Part of this difficulty, I suggest, is that the subject is itself a site of this ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency. A theory of the subject should take into account the full ambivalence of the conditions of its operation (Butler, 1997, p.15).

The work is interrogating from within. This lived experience that occurs through the duration of the work. The extension of time becomes subversive. The repetition of nothingness, of simply being watched and watching. It is the embodiment of Berger's claim that women watch themselves being watched as I am very clearly adjusting my position in the space to fit into the frame of the screen. This is making me watch myself. In the studio this is done anyway, by bringing it in to the gallery, it is now a live performance, performance-to-camera-to a live and online audience. Performance for me seems like the most direct way of getting a point across and engaging with multiple audiences at once. It becomes an intersubjective experience for the spectator, as they must decide what incarnation of the

¹⁰³ Whether power is conceived as prior to the subject or as its instrumental effect, the vacillation between the two temporal modalities of power ("before" and "after" the subject) has marked most of the debates on the subject and the problem of agency.

performance to watch and in this way creates a heightened atmosphere adding to the discomfort that may not be felt purely through the viewing of such a performance over the Internet. These theoretical issues all enter my head as I sit in the box, watching myself being watched. I wonder what people get from this action or lack thereof. As the weeks progress so to does the work. It becomes less frantic and I get more comfortable with the thoughts of inviting the spectator to watch me do nothing, on numerous platforms at once. I want them to wonder why I would do this and I want them to wonder why they should be watching it.



Installation shot from QSS show performance, 'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'

The work progressed in how I dealt with the language of the actual technology and how that manipulates the image that output. The value of poor images and intertwined with White's theories on the cam girl being "too close to see" and therefore in control of how she is seen. I wonder how I can manipulate the body digitally whilst still acting out these poses. This is repetition with a difference. On the final performance I wear a green strapless top and skirt which the computer keys out. I also invested in some new beauty products, in particular the 'maxi mask', which I use to cover my face from time to time. In these works I am dealing with visibility, by being present and invisible at the same time. Taking up space whilst also fragmenting and glitching the body.



YouTube image of later performances from QSS Gallery Show



YouTube image of later performances from QSS Gallery Show



YouTube image of later performances from QSS Gallery Show

The practice element of this research served as a way to try out new strategies and respond to the theoretical investigations of the thesis. The works here are all available to view on the disc provided in Appendix B.

APPENDIX B

PhD Art Practice Outputs
2013-2016

EXHIBITIONS

2016

'On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl'

Solo Exhibition

QSS Gallery, Belfast.

'Belfast International Festival of Performance Art'

(Sweetheart live & online performance, 1 hour)

Ulster University, Belfast

'RUA Annual Exhibition'

(Fragmented, single channel video installation, 8.00 mins)

Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland

'This Frontier so Familiar so Strange', group exhibition

(eBay Dancing, single channel video, 0.57 mins; SweetHeart multitasking, single channel video, 27.03 mins)

ARTicle Gallery, Birmingham School of Art, England.

2015

'Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity'

Solo Exhibition

PSSquared Gallery, Belfast

'Livestock at FIX15' performance festival,

(Jumprope live and online performance, 11.20 mins)

Platform Arts, Belfast

'Film Free and Easy'

(SweetHeart Selfie videos, video installation, various durations)

Primary Gallery, Nottingham, England

'The Beauty Parlour'

(SweetHeart Jumprope Performance)

Culture Night, Belfast.

'Live Stock Performance night'

(The girl who has everything, I want more, performance, 2 hours)

MART, Dublin, Ireland.

Remote Photo Festival, group exhibition & performance

(Have it All, installation; SweetHeart performance)

Regional Arts Centre, Letterkenny, Donegal, Ireland.

2014

'Performing the self, performing the other'

(Have it All, performance, 1 hour)

Dublin Live Art Festival @Art Lot, Ireland.

CONFERENCES

'Feminism & the Body in Performance: Current Practices'

Paper title: Subversive or Submissive? Exploring responses to everyday self-produced femininity on social media within feminist art practice

Two-Day symposium, MART Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

'Console-ing Passions 2015 International Conference on Television Video, Audio, New Media and Feminism.

Paper title: Subverting the Screen: Methods of subverting the online pornified body in feminist art practice.

Dublin, Ireland.

'Aesthetics and the Feminine Conference'

Paper title: Methods of subverting femininities online through feminist art practices. Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) & Philosophy Department, University College Cork, Ireland.

'SIBEAR Irish Postgraduate Feminist and Gender Studies Network 8th Annual Conference'

Paper title: *Critical, Strange and Not Very Sexy*

University of Limerick, Ireland

PUBLICATIONS

2016

Abridged 0 – 48: Mercury Red, Art Magazine

Edited by Gregory McCarthy

Published by Abridged

International Sculpture Center Blog

Interview 'In the studio with Laura O'Connor' by Dorothy Hunter

2014

Abridged 0 – 37: Torquemada, Art Magazine

Edited by Gregory McCarthy

Published by Abridged

APPENDIX C

USB Contents

Documentation of Art Practice

Have it All 2013-2014

01. Have it All (scrolling)

Single channel, Quicktime video, 4.25 mins

02. Have it All (on the beach)

Single channel, Quicktime video, 3.01 mins

SweetHeart 2014-2017

Folder 01

Early SweetHeart Selfie videos

Single channel, Quicktime video, 20.20 mins

Folder 02

Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity

Images

PDF Exhibition and performance documentation

Video

01. Dream Room

Single channel, .mp4 video, 9.11 mins

02. False nails a HOW TO by SweetHeart

Single channel, .mp4 video, 6.25 mins

03. Fun workout on treadmill

Single channel, .mp4 video, 11.18 mins

04. PSSquared multitasking workout

Single channel, .mp4 video, 27.03 mins

Folder 03**The girl who has everything, I want more**Images

PDF Performance images

Video

'The girl who has everything, I want more'

Single channel, Quicktime video (excerpt), 7.58 mins.

Folder 04**Periscope videos**

01. 'Excuses don't burn calories'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 4.00 mins.
02. 'Contours over curves #notinterested'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 5.46 mins.
03. 'Run now chocolate later'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 2.51 mins.
04. 'Dream girl'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 9.04 mins.
05. 'Welcome to Paradise'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 7.54 mins.
06. 'Fashion Blogger'
Single channel, Quicktime video, 8.06 mins.

Folder 05**On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl**Images

PDF Exhibition and Performance documentation

Videos

01. 'Ridiculous possibilities and nail varnish'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 2.12.59 hrs.
02. 'Prosecco made me do it'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.52.31 hrs.
03. 'I fell in love'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.56.10 hrs.
04. 'My beauty day routine'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.30.06 hrs.
05. 'Fragmented'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 2.05.40 hrs.
06. 'Jump cut freeze frame'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.57.31 hrs.

PRACTICE 2012-2017

The practice element of my PhD research worked as an investigative method with which to question new strategies in the field of feminist video and performance on social media. By experimenting with techniques and new media I sought to find a way of creating works were both subversive on social media and existed as a gallery-based works. These works responded to the theoretical investigations and questions I was asking in the thesis.

Throughout the thesis and in my research I came across many issues in this type of practice. How practices performed in the gallery and online, one being an everyday activity and one a professional practice. The pieces I created existed on many platforms and engaged with a variety of spectators and spectator experience. Due to the conditions of viewing content online being out of my control the work became focused on achieving a certain amount of control through methods of installation and interaction. In chapter four of the thesis I discuss Micheal Wench's theories on context collapse, where the presentation of the self on these platforms is experienced in unknown situations to the producer. In my practice I dealt with ways of creating embodied and haptic experiences for the spectator. I wanted the spectator to be aware of their participation in the act of looking which is more than just passive, whereby they are made aware that looking contributes to the perpetuation of cultural norms in the performance of acceptable female subjectivity. I explored many different strategies of interaction to make this happen. I looked at flicker books and tumblr pages that encouraged scrolling. I also created live installations that fragmented the image on screen and the way the audience interact with the work.

In the following text I will describe the studio works created alongside my theoretical investigations. In the descriptions I will tie in practical decisions made based on the theoretical enquiry I was dealing with at that time in the research.

01. **Have it All 2013-2014**

WORKS:

Have it All (scrolling)

Single channel, Quicktime video, 4.25 mins

Have it All (on the beach)

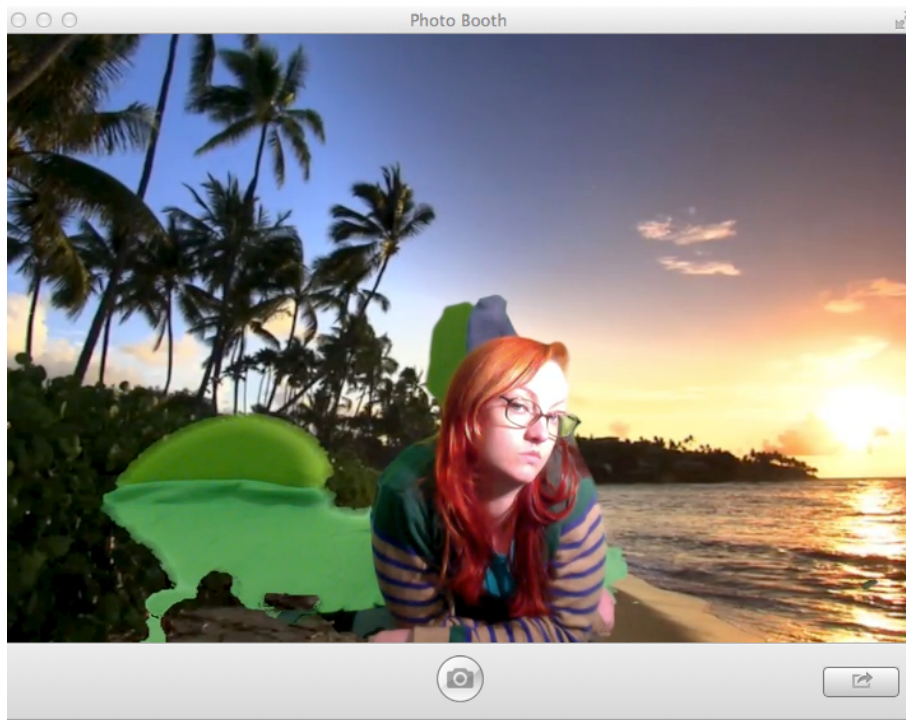
Single channel, Quicktime video, 3.01 mins

Have it All was a starting point in the studio practice. I had been looking at postfeminist language or what Amy Shields Dobson refers to as “hetero-sexy” where a young woman who depicts herself as ‘laddish’, ‘sexy’, ‘wild’ and that she is “often framed for viewers by mottos of self-descriptive texts proclaiming confidence, and dismissing the potential criticisms or judgements of viewers on the basis of autonomy and self-acceptance” (Shields Dobson, 2014, p.98). The term *Have it All* could be described under this banner of hetero-sexy, as the message that is typically used to describe women who can achieve success in careers as well as the home has been changed in this instance to offer up a type of possessive spectatorship. The language used in high street fashion that both offers resistance to a type of male gaze and also an invitation to the male gaze is discussed in the thesis under Angela McRobbie’s theories of the postfeminist condition as being a double entanglement (O’Connor, 2018, p.92). In mirroring these fashion trends I created a pair of underpants with the words ‘have it all’ on them, these were the starting point in the video works.

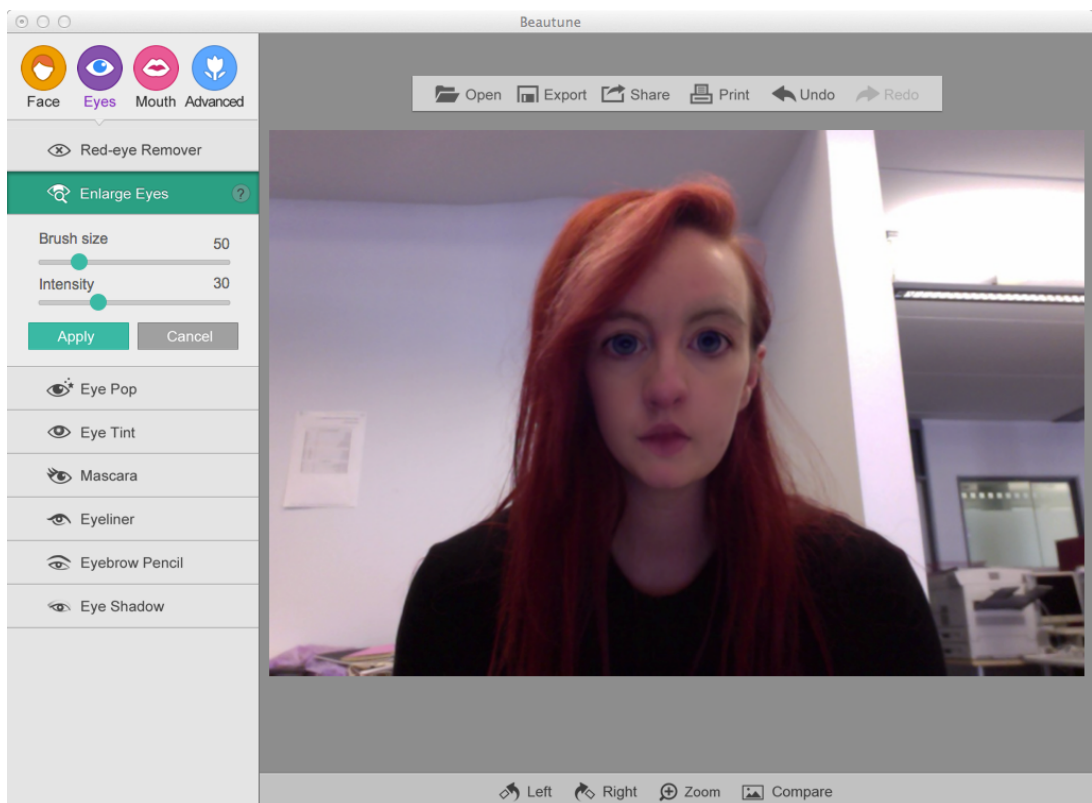


Have it All, studio image, May 2014

In thinking about the messages printed on clothes in high street shops whilst also thinking about the modes of self-imaging in these spaces I began to explore using different types of cameras, techniques and social media platforms to create new works. Green screen technology is something I had been using for a few years and this came into the work also. I was exploring apps on my laptop and phone that encouraged a type of image manipulation such as my MacBook Pro app photobooth changing the background of a video to a beach. Others included makeover apps such as Beautune. On the app it states: **Beautune** can automatically soften skin and touch-up makeup, remove blemishes easily. It provides tools for every aspect of portrait retouching and facial reshaping. With no learning curve, you can start portrait retouching like a pro immediately.



Photobooth experiments, December 2013.



Beautune app experiments, December 2013.



Virtual celebrity makeover, Sienna Miller, February 2014.

In using these apps to distort or un-beautify I was acting against notions of conventional beauty to a point of absurd, however, I felt that even posting these on a platform like Instagram would be lost. I did use them as my personal Facebook account profile picture but as my friends know me it didn't seem to have an impact, but also made me question what impact was I looking to make? One of my main enquiries in this research is how can a work be subversive online, and challenge accepted norms of femininity that are tied to consumer-driven ideals, this was a big challenge in terms of how one achieves this, or if it is achievable at all.

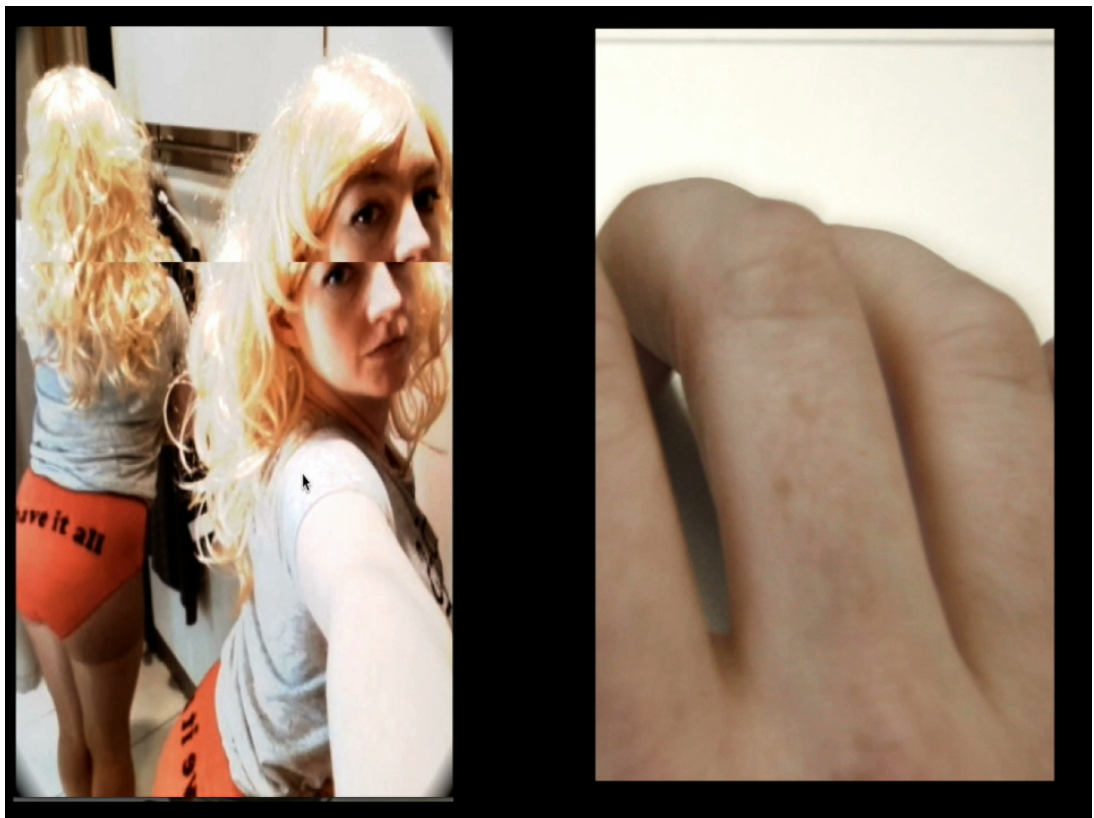
In the studio I created the work *Have it All (on the beach)*, where I dress in a blonde wig and wear a black string vest with the red underpants and roll on the floor. I then add the backdrop of the beach from my photobooth app. In this video I used my phone to capture my body in the form of a selfie but as a moving image. I was trying to achieve a video that explored the act of capturing an image of the body, offering it up to be consumed whilst also denying a full view at any one time. This fragmentation of the body is used as a strategy to deny pleasure or possessiveness whilst also offering the spectator to 'Have it All'. This furthered the idea of a double entanglement by incorporating the imaging technology into the work.



Have it All (on the beach)

Single channel, Quicktime video, 3.01 mins

During this time I was creating selfie videos in changing rooms of clothes shops. Going in with my wig in my bag and picking clothes aligned with a hetero-sexy aesthetic and taking videos on my phone. I found a tumblr page that enabled a type of viewing where you must click or tap your keypad to load the next image. I found this reminded me of a flicker book and I was interested in how I could fragment these videos into stills whereby the spectator must actively tap the keypad or screen to make the image move. However the limits of this were that it only really worked on a laptop and I wanted it to be accessible on many devices. In facing these limits within the online apps I realised how I was working within the structures given and my lack of programming or technical skills meant I would be restricted to what I could achieve in these works. This became both a barrier but also the challenge within this research: how do we challenge the status quo whilst also conforming to its structures?

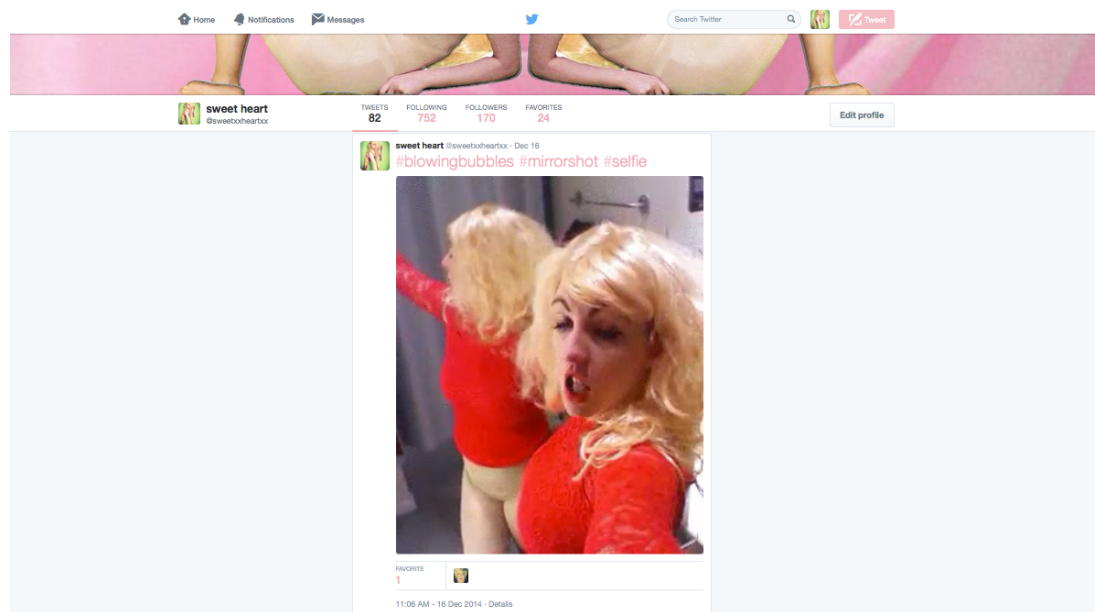


Have it All (scrolling)

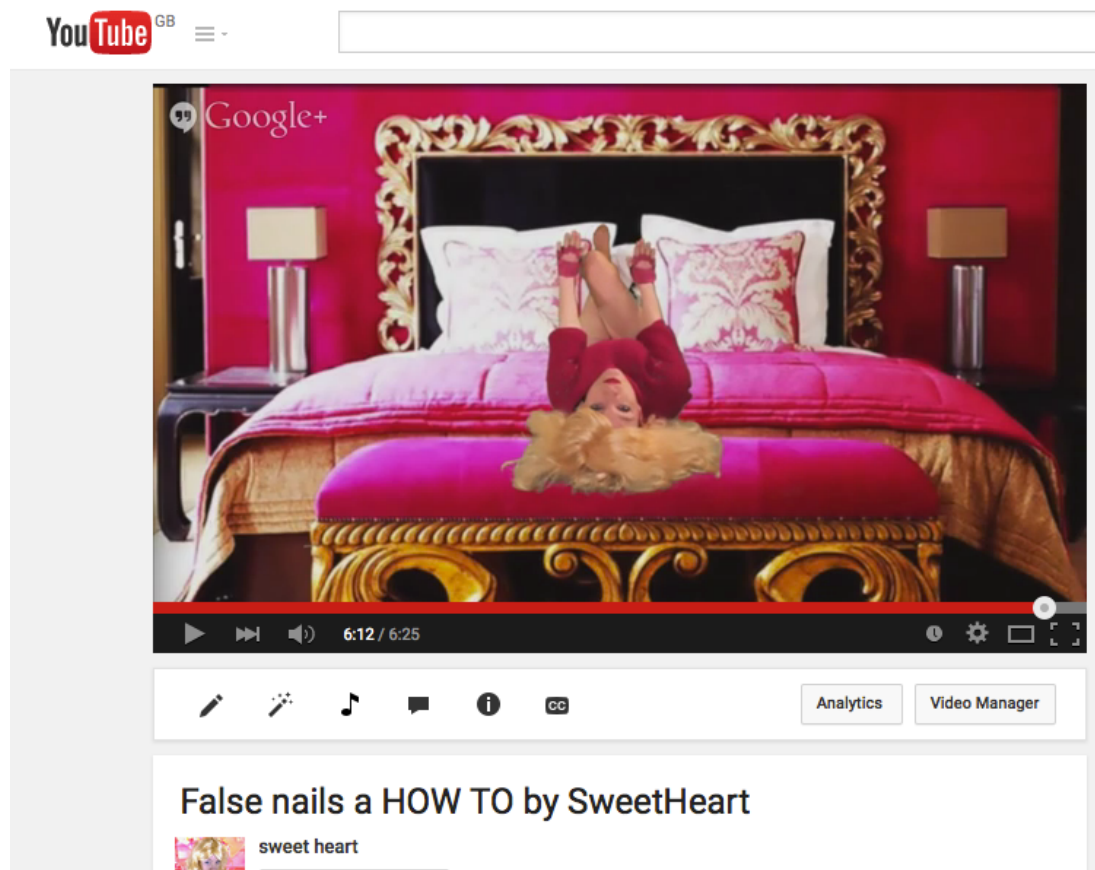
Single channel, Quicktime video, 4.25 mins.

02. **SweetHeart 2014-2017**

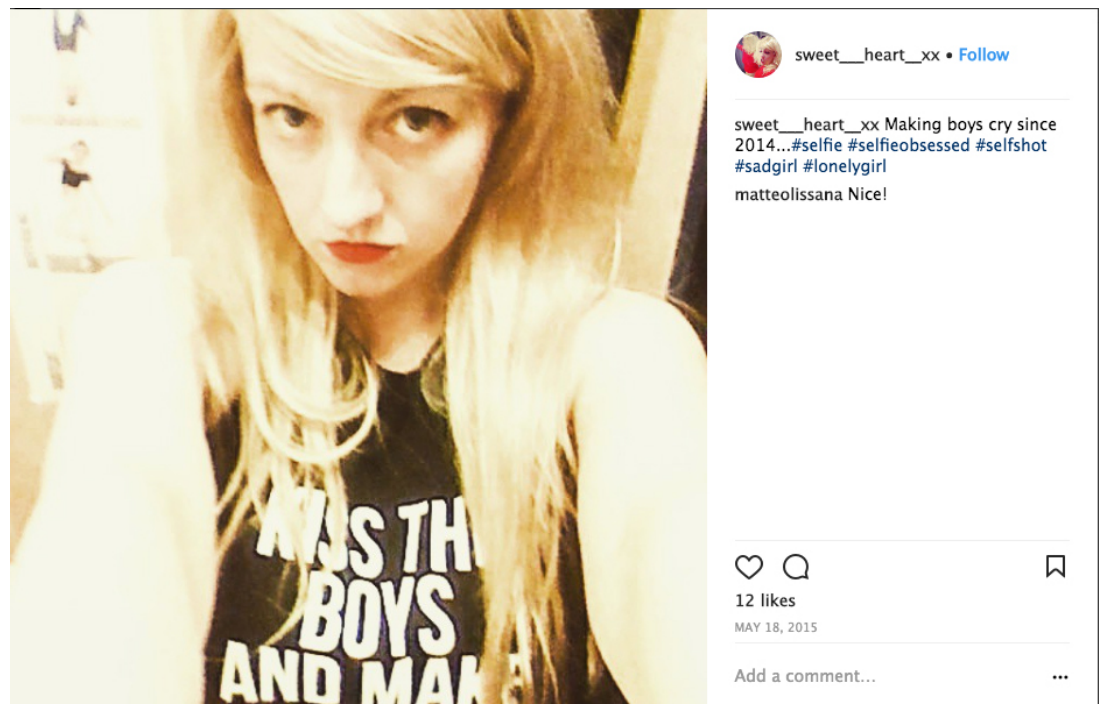
Moving on from these static works I sought to find ways in which I could perform on social media but also separating that performance from my personal identity. I wanted to infiltrate the network, by performing a type of hyper-real postfeminist subject. In thinking through the notion of the double entanglement and the contradictory nature of language within postfeminist sensibilities my aim was to create a character that epitomised these contradictions. In looking for a name I came across the fembot 'SweetHeart' which was a robot/coffee maker that caused controversy at a science exhibition at Berkeley in 1983 due to the condescending nature of what artist and creator Clayton Bailey termed "the world's most beautiful lady robot" (New Statesman, Nov 1983, p.352). I used the name SweetHeart as an ironic name for my online character. I was interested in how this name would attract certain attention and how through my online performances she would not deliver a typical 'sweet heart' performance. I set up an Instagram, Twitter and a YouTube account for her.



Selfie video on SweetHeart's twitter page



How to video on Sweet Heart's YouTube page



Selfie on SweetHeart's Instagram page

As SweetHeart, I began performing and posting videos to the various social media accounts. I was interested in how the different spaces of the performances worked in relation to each other. For instance, my posting an image online from a changing room mirror to it being received on another person's screen in a completely different place. The notion that context of experience is different for every spectator means the image is viewed in infinite ways. I wanted this to be true in the making of the work also. Following on from the *Have it All* works where I was fragmenting the videos and reposting them I wanted to find a way to broadcast live and have some form of interaction or live response. In the beginning I used a livestream website called ustream that posted to twitter each time I was streaming. However, I found I didn't gain many viewers. I then started using YouTube to live stream; this is done by using Google hangouts and YouTube live stream together.

Around this time I was also researching the different types of performances online that were aligned with postfeminist sensibilities of control and power whilst also inviting a type of male gaze and woman for display. I was looking at live tube sites where women perform sexual acts in return for tokens (cash) and are performed in their own homes. I was also looking at bedrooms as spaces of production where young women and girls create vlogs from their rooms performing makeovers or DIY craft videos. Bedroom tours also caught my attention, where these vloggers show viewers their bedrooms and describe their interior design choices. Influenced by these spaces of production that are both private and public I sought to make works that explored these multi-use and fragmented spaces. I was given an opportunity to work in a gallery space for a few weeks in February 2015 and it was here I returned to green screen as a strategy to explore notions of fragmented spaces. The resulting work was a solo exhibition and performance called *Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity* at PS2 Gallery, Belfast.

03. **Simulations, Interfaces & Performativity**

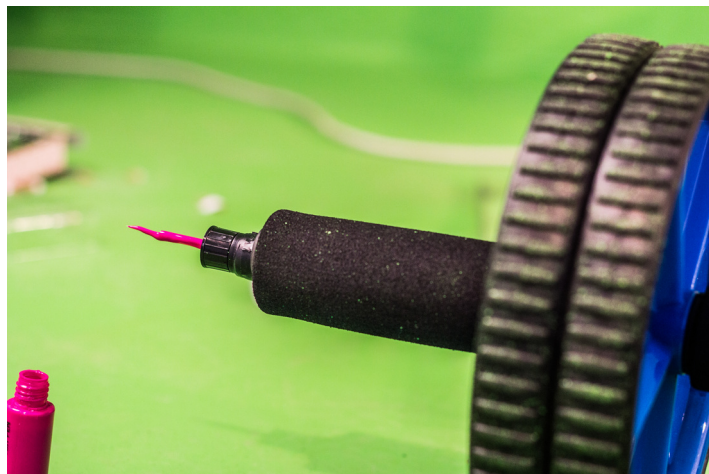
I spent a month in the PS2 space experimenting with performance strategies. I had previously used duration and repetition in my practice as a form of subverting everyday beauty and fitness routines. In works such as *Dull, Limp, Lifeless*, 2011, a 5-minute video projection in which a woman (me) stares directly into the camera wearing a blonde wig while a fan blows her hair around seductively. She is unable to stop the air from the fan

causing her eyes to water and she subsequently looks as though she is crying. Here the authenticity of the situation distorts the illusion of beauty and desire, and explores the line between representation and reality in the media's portrayal of the female body. This performing an act of stillness usually seen in the production of fashion images rather than in the final presentation breaks down the illusion of perfection presented in fashion photography. Moving from studio-based video production to live performance and live video production exposes these illusions ever further. The risk of failure in the performance as a live work is higher and there is no place to hide, this sense of failure becomes paramount to spectator experience.



Dull, Limp, Lifeless, 5mins, single channel video projection, 2011.

In the gallery I painted the walls and floor green to create a green screen studio. I also introduced a number of exercise and beauty products that are marketed to women in their pink appearance and 'feminine' appearance. These objects fall into what Mary Celeste Kearner terms 'pink technology' which she states has more to do with the assumption of gender binaries by researchers and developers than they do with the girls who buy gender directed products (Pink Tech, 2009, p.3). Kearney uses Foucault's theories on governmentality to look at how pink products aimed at girls work to maintain assumptions about the place of women in media making; the object of vision rather than the creator. The assumption that colouring something pink will make it more consumable to women exhibits that this gendered stereotyping continues to categorise women as soft and weak, and men as tough and strong. I further 'feminised' the objects by making them multi-tasking tools such as the ab-roller that doubled as a lipstick and nail varnish applicator.



As part of my research for this show I collected knickers and t-shirts with slogans on them that fitted into the hetero-sexy aesthetic.



I devised a 30-minute performance for the show where I would use the objects I created to perform a multi-tasking DIY video that would be live streamed on YouTube. Filming on green screen I found a program that enabled me to live key myself onto any background I choose. I used an image of a pink bedroom in the background and performed as if I was in the space. In this performance I would use the ab-roller to exercise whilst also tasking myself to apply and paint false nails. The resulting live stream would be viewable from a monitor displayed in the window of the gallery. As the gallery is one long room with a shop front window the audience were invited to view the work from outside the space on the street. This spilling of the work onto the street added an extra element of publicness to the work. As the work was streamed on YouTube notifications were posted to Twitter and the Twitter account was written on the gallery window where spectators could interact through likes and retweets.





sweet__heart__xx • [Follow](#)

sweet__heart__xx Who run the world
#girls

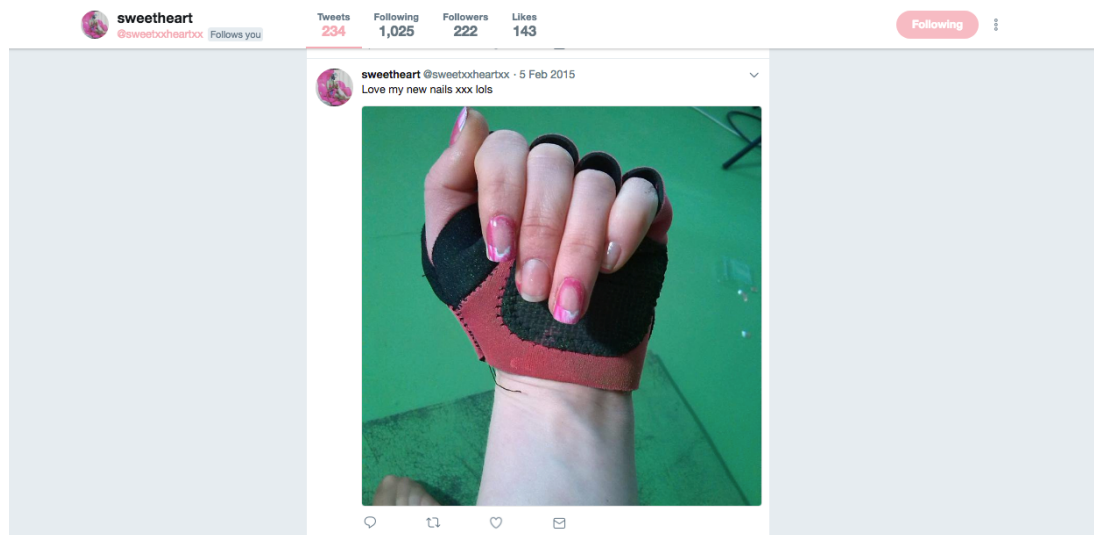


then.theres.kanzi likes this

FEBRUARY 13, 2015

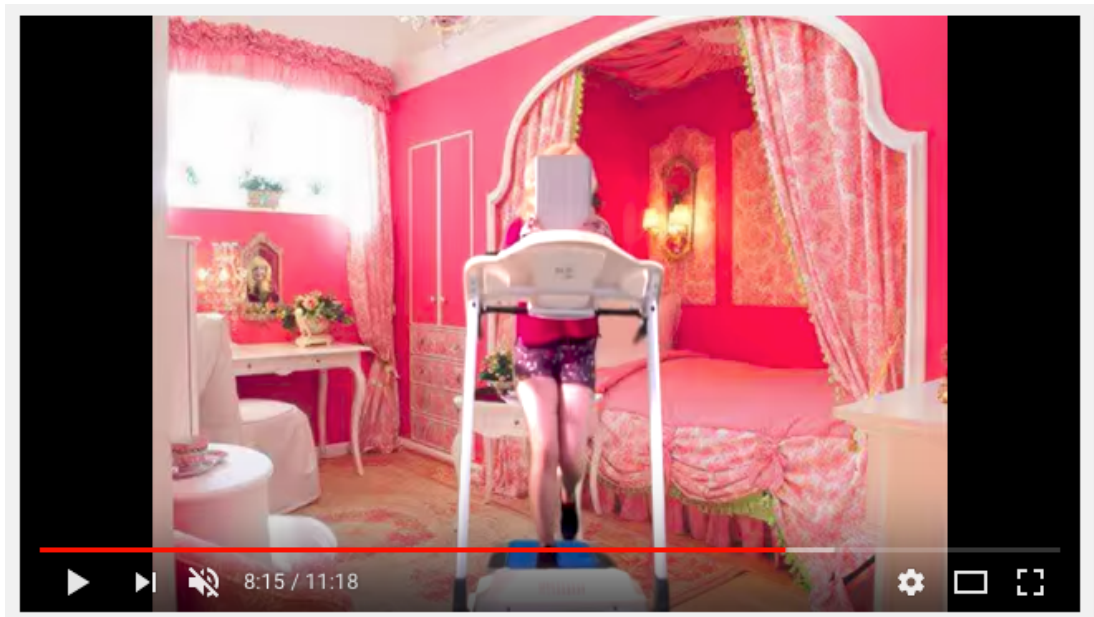
[Add a comment...](#)





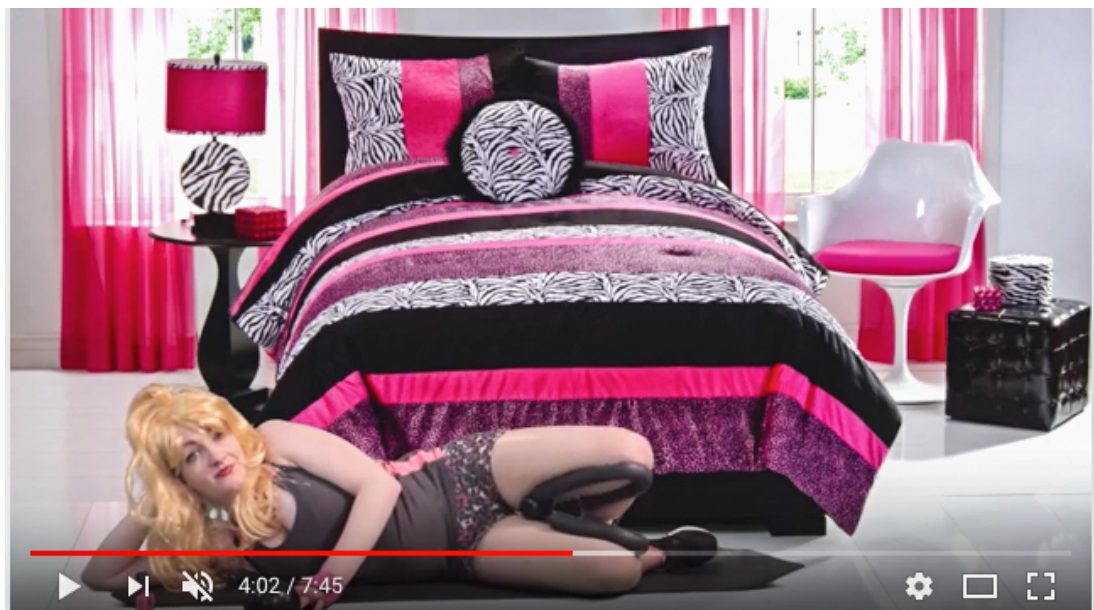
During the performance I would stop and take selfies and post them to Twitter and Instagram. As the t-shirt I was wearing had the term 'Who runs the world girls' which comes from a Beyonce song I mixed that line from the song until it was distorted and played it on repeat. The video that went on to YouTube has a warped sound as the live stream and the live music playing at the same time caused feedback, this happened by chance but it really added to the stress of the situation. SweetHeart began with planking and sticking on the nails. From the start she struggled as the glue from the nails wouldn't open and she had to bite the tube, again this was not planned but only added to the situation. Once she fumbled through getting the nails on whilst struggling to stay in a plank position she then used the ab-roller, of which she found near impossible. She took a break every few minutes to paint the applied nails or apply nail varnish. The resulting video was streamed on YouTube and titled *PSSquared multitasking workout* (27.03 mins).

During my time at PSSquared I created a number of video works that I put on YouTube, all similar to the performance in that I gave SweetHeart a number of near impossible to achieve tasks, which ensued in failure.



Fun workout on treadmill

Single channel, .mp4 video, 11.18 mins



Planking, thigh master and nails

Single channel, .mp4 video, 7.45 mins.

The works produced as part of my residency in PS2 really informed where I brought the practice in the following year of producing work. Moving forward I honed in on developing SweetHeart as a character who used public space to produce multi-platform performances that engaged with spectators on a multitude of levels.

04. **The girl who has everything, I want more**

'The girl who has everything, I want more'

Single channel, Quicktime video (excerpt), 7.58 mins



Livestock, a Dublin-based performance group, invited me to perform for one of their nights in MART Gallery in Dublin. Knowing that I would be sharing the space with other performers and wanting to perform as SweetHeart and to develop this work I was challenged with how to achieve this. As I was looking for my postfeminist t-shirts in Primark I overheard two women in their twenties discussing the reality of mermaids in front of a Disney t-shirt of The Little Mermaid in the women's section. This conversation and the selling of a children's fantasy story of a little mermaid who trades her voice to be human in the pursuit of the true love of a prince intrigued me. These Disney movies from my childhood are now being marketed to grown women in a nostalgic and sometimes ironic look at ridiculous fantasy. However I feel there is less irony than there is fantasy in the purchasing of such items. In keeping with the act of beauty and doing nails I devised a strategy of gluing numerous nails on each finger and in this way making the act of doing

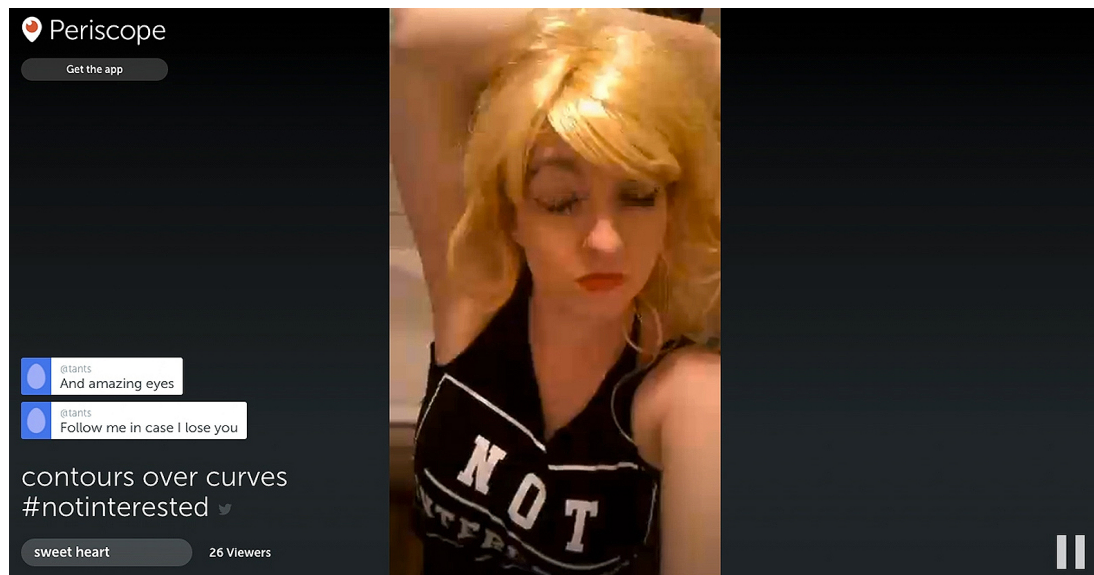
my nails to the point of ridiculous a subversive act. As well as this I wore an extra-long blonde wig and used the ends as paintbrushes that dipped into the nail varnish and painted the grotesquely long nails. The gallery had space in their bathroom for me to perform, here I would live stream onto YouTube and also show the work on an iPad in another part of the gallery. I chose to work in the bathroom as another extension of this private/public space. I used scented nail varnish and sat on the floor for two hours sticking nails and painting them with my hair. I created a sound piece from two lines in a song from the film 'I'm the girl who has everything...I want more'. This played on repeat. The repetition of the sound, the strong smell from the nail varnish and the frustration in trying to apply the ridiculous nails created a manic scene of frustrated failure. Failure occurred in a number of ways that I did not predict. The gallery being an old fire station has very thick walls and due to this the WiFi is terrible, this issue meant the video in the other part of the gallery failed to play. This is something that occurred in many gallery spaces. However the work was broadcast onto YouTube and shared on Twitter.



05. **Periscope videos**

In my studio practice I was looking at ways to create the selfie videos I had developed in the *Have it All* works as live stream works that interacted with an audience. In 2015 Twitter introduced the app Periscope.tv. On Periscope, Twitter users can broadcast live online and the videos they broadcast are deleted after 24 hours. In these videos other users can live comment and show appreciation through tapping the screen, which shows up as a heart. I decided to create videos on this network as SweetHeart using my t-shirts as both inspiration and the titles of the videos. These videos are catalogued on the disc/usb appendix B in the thesis.

In the first video called *Excuses don't burn calories*, 4.00 mins the broadcast was filmed in my bathroom at home. Within seconds I received comments asking me to "show boobs". In the video I stare down the camera lens as if taking a selfie. This extension of the image and my blank expression sought to subvert the selective way in which self-portraits are taken and taken again and edited and graded. SweetHeart's silence in the video frustrated many viewers. In *Contours over curves #notinterested*, 5.46 mins I shot the video again at home in my bathroom and this time used a line from a targeted advert for women's razors. Contouring being a massive makeup trend specifically used in selfies to change the shape of the face. I wore a t-shirt that said 'not interested'. The act of shaving and hair removal being one that is expected of women however generally advertised as some fantasy act that women enjoy doing. The reality, in my experience, it is another taxing and frustrating act that I end up doing out of my reluctance to 'fit it' rather than draw attention to myself. In this broadcast SweetHeart gained attention from one particular follower who kept commenting asking her to 'follow me in case I lose you'. The irony in this is the t-shirt stating her disinterest and the comments looking to be followed. A still of this was featured in Abridged arts and poetry magazine.



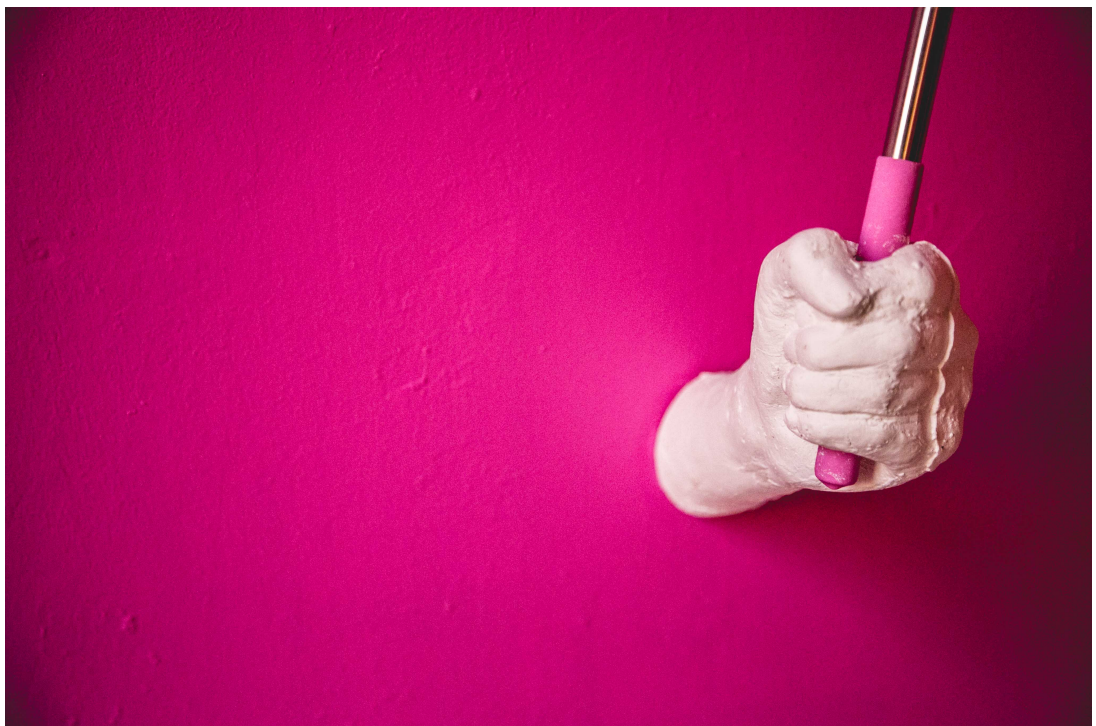
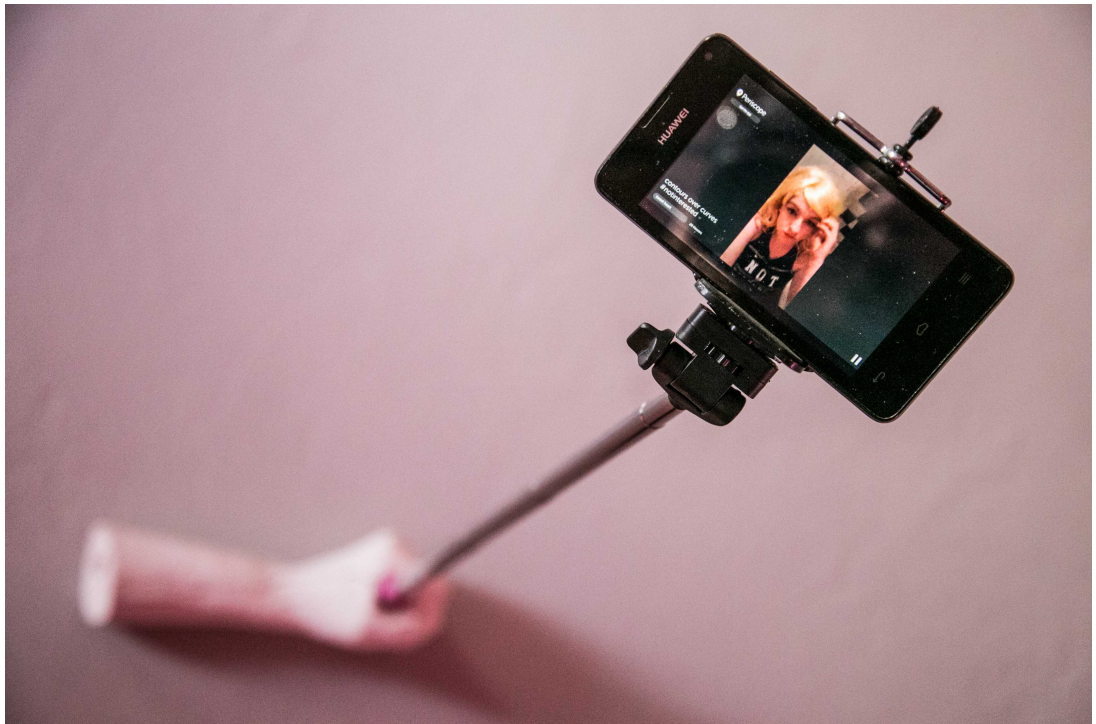
Contours over curves #notinterested, 5.46 mins

In *Dream girl*, 9.04 mins, I took the video at night in a nightclub toilet cubicle. This is the most offensive video I created in terms of responses from viewers and genuinely upset me as I was making it. The comments varied from 'love those lips' to 'show us some titties' 'fuck off', 'lift that top up'. The fact that I was in a toilet cubicle made one viewer call me a 'piece of shit'. I was interested in toilets for the reason that many selfies are produced in bathroom mirrors with toilets in the background; I've always found the semiotics of these images intriguing.

Welcome to Paradise, is the only video where viewers queried if it was performance art. The video was created in a clothes shop changing room. SweetHeart wore a top with the words 'welcome to paradise' printed across the front. Most of the comments were people asking me to take my clothes off or show more and other parts of my body. Again this refers back to the fetishisation of the fragmented body discussed in chapter 6, p.203.

These works were displayed in the gallery on selfie sticks held by plaster cast hands. The sculptures were placed around the gallery at different levels. The installation of the works was done in a way to get spectators to move, bend and stretch in order to access the videos. This strategy of installation aimed to create a more embodied form of spectatorship. As I discussed throughout the thesis and in chapter one in reference to my experience of viewing Lynn Hershman Leeson's works by isolating the spectator in the space where they are actively aware of their viewing creates a more heightened experience. The plaster cast hands acted as postfeminist double-entangled objects in their

own right as they gripped the selfie sticks in a way that could also be used as a gesture for hand-jobs they also make a fist denoting feminism. They could also be described as intra-active objects as discussed in chapter four as “‘digital-material-sensory-affective-spatial assemblage’ in which experiences of sexism and activist events become ‘part of the whole affective sensorium’ that connects those dealing with sexism” (Retallack, et. Al, 2016, p.17). The presentation of these videos where I am textually abused is a strategy in asking the audience to position themselves in a vulnerable state in the gallery as a way to mirror the vulnerability of the woman on screen.





06. **On the Internet everybody knows you're a girl**

Performances & Installation

This was the second exhibition I created as part of the practice element of the PhD. It was in Queen Street Studios, Belfast in May 2016. The title of this show was an ironic take on what Susanna Paasonen describes as 'common knowledge' assumptions of identity associated with the image of the young woman on social media. In the thesis I looked at the dichotomy within performing female subjectivity online, where one must be girlie but not too girlie and 'up for it' but not too slutty, and the versions of femininity deemed 'acceptable' that work to reinforce unrealistic notions and norms onto women's bodies such as healthy, thin, happy, nice, pretty, sexy, white, straight. The title of the exhibition references a cartoon created in 1993 in the New Yorker by Peter Stein. The cartoon states, 'On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog', this reflects a time before images and videos were shared and text-based communication gave more freedom to play with identity as discussed in chapter two via Sherry Turkle and Lisa Nakamura. I used the line for my show

to describe how female bodies presented on social media do not always represent the lived reality or materiality of the woman, so no matter how you view your subjectivity, when you inhabit a female body the image is more important than the reality of ones lived experience. Of course this can be said of anyone who posts self-images online, but in the thesis I have discussed how young white women perform within the codes of acceptable postfeminist femininity.



The use of the term girl and not woman was that even 30-year-old women are called girls in contemporary culture.¹ I discussed Judith Butler's theories on the symbolic power of

¹ For example in the Beyonce song 'Who Runs The World Girls', or the HBO series 'Girls' about a group of twenty-something women in New York City.

'girling' in chapter four, pg.127. Citing the term girl, the female subject takes on the construction of femininity. In postfeminist terms 'girl' has been appropriated with the rise of 'girl power' and riot grrls, the term has been used subversively and submissively. My work explores the performance of female subjectivity that can be defined as many different things online yet still carries massive assumptions, hence the ironic title of "everybody knows".

The exhibition consisted of two rooms. In the first room as you entered the gallery (and viewable from the street) was a large green screen box or performance area. To the side of this was a television mounted on to the wall. In the second room all of the walls were painted pink and placed around the walls and floor were plaster cast arms holding selfie sticks with mobile phones attached playing the periscope videos (discussed above).

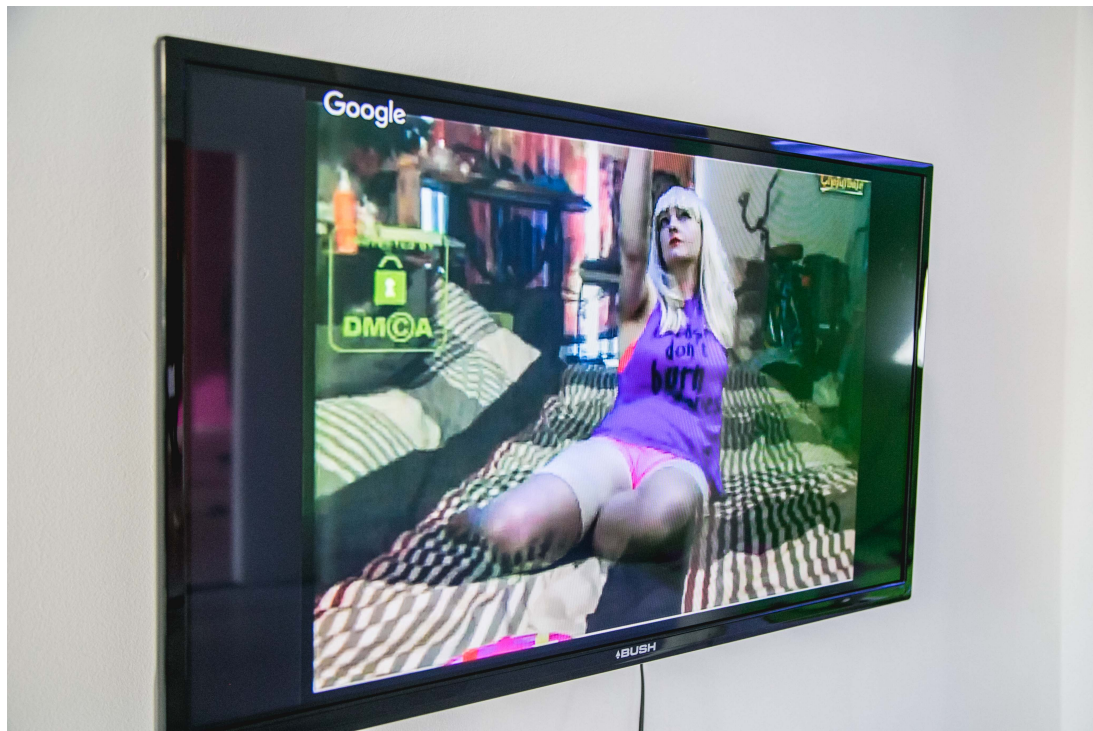
The duration of the exhibition was six weeks and throughout the six weeks I committed to performing live in the space, in total performing eight times for two hour durations. The performances consisted of me dressed as SweetHeart in the box performing to the laptop. From the laptop I keyed the footage of my performance on to different backgrounds that was broadcast live onto YouTube using Google hangouts, as in the PS2 show. I achieved this by using a couple of different programs and hacks. First I use the isight camera on my MacBook Pro to film, this live footage then feeds into a programme called boinxTV which is a live green screen programme used by online TV shows and newscasts. In order to feed this image online I use another program called camtwist, which records my screen (it makes the computer think it is the isight camera) from this I feed the footage of the simulation onto Google hangouts, which broadcasts live onto YouTube. In the gallery I used an Apple TV box to get the live video from YouTube to play onto the TV.

Green screen or chroma keying is a cinematic tool developed as early as the 1930's, it is used as a cheap way to fake large un-shootable shots. We are used to seeing movies that use green screen all the time, most Hollywood films that have CGI will do so using green screen, even though it's a technique developed nearly a century ago it is as effective today as it ever was (although computer graphics have improved). I use green screen as a strategy to expose the construction and unfaithfulness of the image. Green screen is incorporated into the live performance element of the work where viewers can see a monitor with the image of the broadcast and simulation in the same viewing field as the performance.

The green box also acts as a centre point that draws the spectator in. It acts as a spectacle and focal point as you walk into the gallery. As the spectator gets closer to the

In the show in PS2 I used a green exercise ball as a way to balance lying out flat as if I was on a chair, I used this again in QSS. As a strategy in the performance this object provided a number of uses, its unpredictability as an object to balance on created even more tension in the performance. I also used a number of hybrid exercise objects that I created as with the PS2 works. I composed a diary of the opening night performance, in this I explain how I used those objects and the decision making process with the performance.





DIARY FROM OPENING NIGHT PERFORMANCE

...It's a few hours before showtime and I'm pacing the gallery, I have only just decided what to wear, a t-shirt that states 'excuses don't burn calories' and my underpants that have #selfie on the back, plus the usual tan tights, although these are all ripped- I could have bought more but I quite liked the 'badness' of them- makes me think about how no matter how hard I try to conform I always get a hole in my tights or the fake tan I apply is always streaky. The ripped tights are a strategy of aesthetics, or anti-aesthetics and in this they deny a type of visual pleasure associated with perfection and beauty. This work is about visual pleasure and more importantly the denial of that. It's discussing production values, home production, apparatus theory, and the image as physical. Holding that image, creating that image, the before and after shot all at once, and everything in between. And in fact the audience are in-between the image. They are positioned to view the body, the apparatus and the output. Playing tennis with their spectatorial positions as they try to take it all in or 'to have it all'. The audience is over-consuming just as the performer is. SweetHeart buys into the consumption and commodification of femininity as it is produced on social media and in high street shops. The fast fashion market and the fast production of bodies in 'before and after' images online are the fuel she uses. Her situation is one that is on show, 'to-be-looked-at' and her public anti-feminine femininity and the problems with that in the "over saturated stupor" (Braidotti, 2006, p.204) of commodified hyper-real subjectivity.

...Coming up to 5pm I check all the technology, set up the green screen software, adjust lights and the position of the laptop, go on YouTube and make sure the live stream will work. Time to get clothes on and set up. I enter the space before the gallery opens and sit, getting comfortable with my short-term home for the evening. For this performance I have created a background video that is a combination of cam girl bedrooms live recorded on my screen, YouTube bedroom tours by middle class teenage girls, and dolls houses. I used these 'feminine' spaces as I was thinking about girlieness as a signifier and rooms where cultural production was done. In her writing on immaterial labour on digital media Kylie Jarrett describes how even the act of 'liking' on Facebook is a form of disciplinary action where "you also submit yourself to, and legitimate, a historically contingent relationship to capital accumulation which is part of a broad global system generating intolerable inequities and exclusions" (Jarrett, 2014, p.24).

The production of these videos, although many created for monetary return, can highlight classed and racial lines of representation produced in online spaces.² Many of the women I have experienced online in these contexts are white middle class conventionally pretty young women. Although Michele White points out in her book *Producing Women* (2015), there are white women on these (online) spaces challenging such conventions, through alternative beauty acts such as 'frankenings' nail polish bloggers, or zombie brides on Flickr. White states that the whiteness of zombie makeup in zombie wedding pictures "skews the features of earlier constructions of cosmetic whiteness and can thereby help to reveal the produced characteristics of gender, race, and sexuality" (White, 2015, p.140). Another of White's points on femininity online is a critique of the use of glitter and "too much" make up as a feminine signifier. She uses 'queer' to define that "too much"..."points to conflicts in cultural conceptions of gender and other identity categories. It destabilises and queers the structures by which we understand and navigate the world" (White, p.165). White also draws associations to the excessive use of glitter amongst women bloggers with drag, where the feminine assumptions of glitter use are more in line with drag, she states: "this expansion or explosion of femininity and the body more associated with horror and monstrosity" (White, p. 165).

My use of the bedroom space acts as tool to relate to typically feminine spaces however the overuse of these images and the overuse or even comedic/tragic use of the pink equipment and make-up surrounding me work to queer notions of femininity in the way

² For example, Gajjala (2000) suggests that they are rooted in an "Anglo-American hegemony which emphasizes the importance of modern science and technology for individual empowerment" and universalize the experiences of white, middle-class girls (p. 118)

that White describes her online subjects doing. While the vlogger bedroom videos I acquired use beauty as their main focus, the other rooms I used were from www.chaturbate.com, a website that hosts live webcam performers, who perform for free receiving tokens and offering private sex/strip shows for a fee. Chaturbate it is a site that amateur performers use, where porn studies writer Feona Attwood describes, in her book *Mainstreaming Sex*, ordinary people put themselves in the frame (Attwood, xvii). What interests me about these spaces is the time and effort put in to sitting in front of a camera for hours, without even performing, you see a lot of women just staring into the camera or even just lying on their beds ignoring the camera waiting for an audience and someone to 'tip', in this way my interest is types of labour they perform, or not as the case can very well be.

...I'm still not sure what I will do in the performance. I have made myself a few props. For this show and in all my work I like to bring in sculptural elements, I collect exercise equipment and beauty products. The gym equipment I choose tends to be pink, following on from Mary Celeste Kearney's critique of 'pink technology' I am drawn to items that are marketed to women by making them pink and 'girlie'.





I was thinking about women online and the performances they do based on body maintenance, food, beauty, or simply being looked at. I surrounded myself with objects that I fashioned into multitasking tools to give myself tasks as I prepared to sit in the box for 2-3 hours. I combined an elastic resistance band with a lipstick so I could stretch and put my makeup on at the same time. I glued nail varnish brushes onto weights so I again could work out and beautify simultaneously. There is humour in these objects, but I feel that the position my character is in and the doing of these tasks repetitively become harder to watch, she is not failing as such as these objects are failing her. I've talked about schizoid subjectivity and this is something that was on my mind as I created these works. SweetHeart is herself a commodity and a consumer, her nature is schizoid and as such a product of her interactions with bodily maintenance online. She is interested in before and after images, how many reps of such a thing make my bum smaller or bigger. But being somewhat present in the 'real world' SweetHeart is overcome with this barrage of tips and tricks, the humour in the work is short lived, not that she wants sympathy, she is just bored.

As I mentioned when talking about past works the use of duration works as a tool, these performances are unnaturally long, especially as the actions performed are generally slow or non-moving. This drawn out duration is used to act against the nature of the entertaining image and I am also interested in extending poses. I am drawn to images where women are posing in strange positions and like to imagine what that would look like played out in performance. I am naturally a bit awkward and find if I try to look sexy I end up failing, so by trying these poses whilst balancing on an exercise ball over the space of 10 minutes or

more the action becomes hard to watch and creates a tension between audience and performer.

...The opening happened at 6pm, people slowly came in and walked around, some stopped to watch me, others went for the booze and into the second gallery. In many of my performances I am not really sure how they will unfold, I am still not sure if I can call it performance, that terms troubles me sometimes. I don't really feel like I perform, Erving Goffman states that we are all performing in our everyday life to some extent, in that sense what I do is more than the everyday but less than theatre or some linear planned out performance piece. This work is an extension of my studio practice. In the studio I can dress up and move objects around press record and stop on the camera whenever I want to change something, this is the studio made explicit! I suppose then this work not only exposes the subject of women performing online in different capacities but also the work of the artist who performs to camera in her studio. It was women artists who embraced the video camera to make performative works in the 1970s, even when they were accused of narcissism³.

When making such work in a live capacity it is hard to feel like you are not a narcissist. Commanding an audience to watch you perform, or not, is daunting and can feel extremely self-indulgent, but only in the way that you feel others *think* it is self-indulgent. When I plan for the works I am very clear that this is important work and is not something I am doing to feed my ego. But it can feel that way when the main spectacle is you. But I don't see it as me this 'SweetHeart' is performing a multiple female subjectivity. Her fragmented nature makes her subjectivity difficult to pin down. Yes, the clothes she wears are highly loaded, but what about the layers of tan tights with holes in? The bad wig, and her bad application of make-up? It is a tragic-comic masochistic performance. SweetHeart is not me, she is not anybody, she is a work of fiction, a hyper-real simulation⁴. Like Braidotti's post-human simulators SweetHeart is a kind of postmodern subject, unlike her simulators, SweetHeart is messy, her rituals are hard to watch, gloopy messy neon nail varnish, lipstick all over the place, heart shaped chocolate- material things - matter. Not a simulation but real matter, simulated into fragmented images and broadcast onto the network. SweetHeart is so

³ In 1976 Lucy Lippard wrote of Hannah Wilke's work :(the)"confusion of her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist, [which] has resulted at times in politically ambiguous manifestations." ('The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art', from *Art in America*, 64 (3) (1976):73-81

⁴ There you have the Pantheon of postmodern femininity, live on CNN at any time, any place, from Hong Kong to Sarajevo, yours at the push of a button. Interactivity is another name for shopping, as Christine Tamblyn put it, and hyper-real gender identity is what it sells Hyper-reality does not wipe out class relations: it just intensifies them (Braidotti, 1996, p.2).

fragmented she is 'in the flesh'...embodied, and, at the same time she is a simulation of a simulation. In this way there is no authentic self, she is the artist as alter ego she is also an image that works on multiple levels.

I have studied the writings of Braidotti, Irigaray and Butler looking for definitions as to what my work did or said or tried to do. I have always performed popular notions or images of Woman, in numerous guises and disguises. I have investigated what it means to represent Woman in visual language. My work has always tried to respond to the absurdities I see on television and in advertising where women are represented as a homogenous group- they are unreal women, as opposed to the 'real' women who exist in 'everyday' life. I grew up very real, well to the best of my knowledge, and to be honest as a child who was thin and lived with much older sisters who struggled with weight, I was always seen as "so lucky" to be thin. I feel like this has had an effect on how I view my body, especially in adolescence when my body started to change and when I went to college and the excesses of student life took its toll. My undergraduate work seemed to always investigate body image and identity. This topic has always been the underlying current in my work, that and surveillance. I have always been interested in how we look at people and how people look, but more than that the feeling of being watched even when we are not, or do we know? I thought about Foucault and his panopticon theories, and the paranoia in Kafka.

Representation and the fictions within representation interested me. However, I have always thought of the notion of Woman as simply that- a notion, not a truth or a known thing but something created through fiction and as way of domination or segregation in the way that it is tied to the idea of femininity. Man, too, is a notion, created as a force of discipline, to be a man is an unknown thing, but what we do know is that the myth of masculinity and femininity are still played out in public today. That public encompasses the everyday: politics, the home, the workplace, the courts, the Internet, the social. My focus is on the commodification of these myths and the acting of them within the everyday. These myths become commodified on screen. Looking at these presentations as myths I turn to Judith Butler who rather than Braidotti's thesis of reappropriating notions of femininity and presenting woman not as a known subject but fragmented, Butler suggests we leave it all behind and accept that gender is a construct created as a form of power and control, and through subversive performance we can challenge the whole construct from the outside. Questions of sexual difference and gender become complicated to my work and me. I feel that although my work aims to be subversive it is still participating in some kind of recon/decon-struction of heteronormative subjectivity, a re-territorialising. The idea that inserting ones own body in the work is a narcissistic display and impossible to have any

true value as art in the fact that it is repeating the thing it is interrogating. Butler is also cautious about the agency within subjugation, for if we are challenging gendered subjectivity and working to remove the shackles of this regulated position, what happens after that? If the subject is produced *by* power then agency is the impasse of the subject but if power's produced by the subject then agency is the condition of the subject.⁵ Butler states:

Part of this difficulty, I suggest, is that the subject is itself a site of this ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency. A theory of the subject should take into account the full ambivalence of the conditions of its operation (Butler, 1997, p.15)

The work is interrogating from within. This lived experience that occurs through the duration of the work. The extension of time becomes subversive. The repetition of nothingness, of simply being watched and watching. It is the embodiment of Berger's claim that women watch themselves being watched as I am very clearly adjusting my position in the space to fit into the frame of the screen. This is making me watch myself. In the studio this is done anyway, by bringing it in to the gallery, it is now a live performance, performance-to-camera-to a live and online audience. Performance for me seems like the most direct way of getting a point across and engaging with multiple audiences at once. It becomes an intersubjective experience for the spectator as they must decide what incarnation of the performance to watch and in this way creates a heightened atmosphere adding to the discomfort that may not be felt purely through the viewing of such a performance over the Internet. These theoretical issues all enter my head as I sit in the box, watching myself being watched. I wonder what people get from this action or lack thereof.

As the weeks progress so to does the work. It becomes less frantic and I get more comfortable with the thoughts of inviting the spectator to watch me do nothing, on numerous platforms at once. I want them to wonder why I would do this and I want them to wonder why they should be watching it.

⁵ Whether power is conceived as prior to the subject or as its instrumental effect, the vacillation between the two temporal modalities of power ("before" and "after" the subject) has marked most of the debates on the subject and the problem of agency.

The work progressed in how I dealt with the language of the actual technology and how that manipulates the image that output. The value of poor images and intertwined with White's theories on the cam girl being "too close to see" and therefore in control of how she is seen. I wonder how I can manipulate the body digitally whilst still acting out these poses. This is repetition with a difference. On the final performance I wear a green strapless top and skirt which the computer keys out. I also invested in some new beauty products, in particular the 'maxi mask', which I use to cover my face from time to time. In these works I am dealing with visibility, by being present and invisible at the same time. Taking up space whilst also fragmenting and glitching the body.

In the works detailed here I worked through issues that came up in the research and attempted to develop new strategies of making work on social media spaces that were also effective as gallery-based works. The works here are all available to view on the disc provided in Appendix B.





Images

PDF Exhibition and Performance documentation

Videos

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 01. | 'Ridiculous possibilities and nail varnish'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 2.12.59 hrs |
| 02. | 'Prosecco made me do it'
Single channel, .m4 video, 1.52.31 hrs |
| 03. | 'I fell in love'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.56.10 hrs |
| 04. | 'My beauty day routine'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.30.06 hrs |
| 05. | 'Fragmented'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 2.05.40 hrs |
| 06. | 'Jump cut freeze frame'
Single channel, .mp4 video, 1.57.31 hrs |